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SEPT 2015
ISSUE 320

Mountain Biking UK®

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- Bikepacking kit ideas
- Isle of Man epic loop

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Can this man win
the 2016 World
Champs?

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Sharper shifting - how to index your gears for cleaner changes - pg 142

First Rides of Canfield Balance, Scott Gambler 730, Norco Aurum C7.3 - pg 44

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* Pull-out maps not available to overseas readers

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GO TO FIRST!**

EDITOR'S LETTER

The lengths we go to for new adventures



How far would you go to uncover a new descent you haven't ridden before? Would you be prepared to hike-a-bike? Or would it depend more on whether there's room in the uplift van that day? I'm guessing you probably wouldn't go to the same lengths Sam Flanagan is

willing to go to, which involves 650ft of vertical rock climbing, without ropes, and with his bike strategically strapped to his back. That's part of what makes mountain biking so appealing — we all seek the inevitable buzz it gives us in different ways. Some of us like to have as much of a thrill getting there as actually riding the fun bits. You can find out how Sam got on with his rock climb and, more importantly, whether the descent was worth it on page 62.

For those who prefer their adventures a little more straightforward, take a look at our cracking new route on the Isle of Man on page 144. It may not be as pacey as the famous TT races over there but it's definitely a challenge. Happy riding!

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Danny

Danny Walter MBUK Editor



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MBUK

Out Front

THE **FIVE STORIES** LEADING
THE WAY THIS MONTH






CRANKWORX L2A

Rheeder's on a roll

With three of this year's six FMB World Tour diamond series rounds in the bag, Canadian slopestyle phenomenon Brett Rheeder hit the picturesque location of Les Deux Alpes, France, with one thing on his mind – retaining his series lead in the face of some serious competition from one of the most intimidating athletes in the discipline, Brandon Semenuk.

Despite the presence of other top riders including the UK's Sam Pilgrim and Sam Reynolds, Belgium's Thomas

Genon and fellow Canadians Logan Peat and Anthony Messere, all eyes were on Brett and Brandon as they battled the wind and the technical nature of the Crankworx L2A course.

In the end, it was the young upstart from Ontario who took the win, with a run that included a cork 720 and a backflip opposite tailwhip. Scoring a solid 93.5 out of 100, Brett's near flawless run gives him a convincing lead in the series points and a great chance of winning the Crankworx Triple Crown too. 

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Photo: FMB World Tour/Ala D' Lullo



GORTIN GLEN

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New trail centre for NI

The Sperrin Mountains, Northern Ireland's largest range, are the fitting location for the province's newest trail centre, which is set to boast at least 30km of purpose-built mountain bike trails, along with a shop, cafe and other visitor facilities.

A short drive from the town of Omagh in County Tyrone lies Gortin Glen Forest Park, a 1,534-hectare

estate that was originally planted for timber production. With acres of coniferous woodland and some of the best topography in the area, it was identified as a potential trail centre location in Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland's 10-year mountain bike strategy.

To get things rolling, Bristol-based trail wizards Architrail hopped over the Irish Sea and began marking out

what could be done. With a significant amount of the necessary funding secured and plans to build a visitor hub including a cafe, shop, toilets and changing facilities, the future looks bright for the sport on the Emerald Isle, especially with great trails already on offer half an hour up the road at Davagh Forest and further afield at Castlewells and Rostrevor, among other locations. 

Photo: Simon Nieborak



PINT-SIZED PUSHBIKES

Kids' bikes just grew up

If you're a mountain biker and have kids then it goes without saying that you're going to want to share the experience of riding bikes with them. But until recently, it was difficult to get hold of a kids' bike suitable for the rigours of proper off-road riding. Full-suspension options were extremely limited and pint-sized hardtails – with a few exceptions, most notably those from Islabikes – tended to be heavy and poorly equipped, needing a good dose of bodging and customising to make them fit for purpose.


Thankfully times have changed, and with more people cycling than ever before the demand for decent children's bikes has grown to the point where manufacturers are taking

this area of the market seriously. There are now some properly rad kids' rides available.

At the burlier end of things, Commencal have the Supreme, a full-on 'mini me' all-mountain bike, complete with their trademark neon paint and a choice of 20in or 24in wheels. Kona – one of the first brands to get their foot in the door – have been refining their Stinky 24 groms' freeride rig since the early 2000s. And Transition are new to the (kids') table but their 24in wheeled Ripcord – pictured above – looks like a right little ripper.

Specialized have always had a good selection of sensible kids' hardtails and now offer two junior fatbikes too – the Fatboy Junior 20 and 24. And they're not the

only ones jumping on the monster truck bandwagon – Genesis have miniaturised their Caribou to create the 20in wheeled Caribou Jr. Trek have taken a different tack, making a downscaled, 26in wheeled version of their popular Fuel EX XC/ trail bike, with everything from the suspension to the components tailored to the specific needs of younger riders, and promises of an all-in weight that should be easy for little legs to handle.

All this means that there's no longer any excuse to saddle your offspring with a cheap, heavy superstore ride – except maybe the price of these 'proper' MTBs, which can be hard to stomach, especially when you know that next growth spurt could relegate it to the back of the shed... 

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THE BRISTOL BULLET

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High flying Laurie Greenland

After an amazing three out of three podium finishes in this year's Junior Downhill World Cup series, Bristolian speedster Laurie Greenland finally hit the top spot with a clean run at round four in Lenzerheide, Switzerland. Smashing out a time that would have placed him 15th in the Elite category, the 18-year-old went five seconds faster than

second place finisher – and Junior series leader – Andrew Crimmins, of Australia, to take a well deserved win. He then followed that up with a second victory in Mont-Sainte-Anne, Canada, a couple of weeks later.

After a steady 2014 season spent finding his feet in top level racing, this year is all about the series title and the World Championships for Trek World Racing's youngest signing. With

two victories now in the bag, Laurie has everything to play for.

The battle for supremacy in the Junior category this year is really heating up. Will it be the emerging talent from Down Under who triumphs or the more consistent Laurie, who hasn't finished lower than fourth in qualifying or finals all season? It could go either way, but we know whom our money's on! ⚙️

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ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK

Next gen DH damping from Fox

Developed through Fox's RAD (Racing Applications Development) testing programme, prototypes of the DHX2 rear shock first surfaced at the 2013 DH World Championships in South Africa – a race Greg Minnaar won on that very damper. It was also used successfully last year by World Cup champ Josh Bryceland and World Championships winners Gee Atherton and Manon Carpenter.

There are three big external differences compared to the DHX. Firstly, the high- and low-speed compression and rebound damping can now be adjusted independently. Secondly, the adjusters have all migrated to the piggyback unit and gone from knobs and dials to 3mm and 6mm Allen key heads. And finally, there's a new, bright orange SLS (Super Lightweight Steel) spring, which has a smaller coil diameter and fewer coils to save weight, combined with a new surface treatment and stress-relieving process to ensure sufficient strength.

It's inside that the real work has gone on though, with Fox's new Rod Valve System (RVS) promising to deliver their best ever damping control and consistency. It looks like Fox are onto a winner with this one. 

DHX2 shock £499, SLS spring £123,
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The new DHX2 offers separate adjustment of high- and low-speed compression and rebound damping

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27 DIRTY DEBATE
29in vs 650b wheels



34 NEW BIKES AND KIT
RockShox, Lapierre, Orbea

First Rides New DH bikes from Scott and Norco, plus Canfield enduro rig – pg 44

A summer of shredding

Be inspired by the big guns

Here we are in the heart of a UK summer, with plenty of long, dusty days just begging for epic all-day rides or endless sessions at your local spot, where the yellow haze of lingering roost kicked up by drifting back tyres fills the air.

It's all kicking off in the Northern Hemisphere, where the UCI Downhill and XC World Cups are in full swing. There's been a ton of exciting action, including chainless winning runs, record breaking feats and some nasty crashes.

The Enduro World Series is also causing quite a stir, with Richie Rude becoming the first American to win a round, France's Fabien Barel announcing a potential retirement from racing in 2016 and DH

racers like Kiwi Sam Blenkinsop breaking into the top 10.

On the freeride side of things, the Suzuki Nine Knights comp will be going off in Livigno, Italy, at the end of August with its trademark wooden castle jumps and dramatic alpine setting. Keep an eye out for British riders Sam Reynolds and Sam Pilgrim there. Meanwhile, the rider-run FEST Series is red-lining the stoke-ometer with its mammoth jumps and big whips.

What more inspiration could anyone need to get outside, get rad, blow up some turns, kick up some roost and send some jumps? This summer is all about feeling awesome! 🌀



SAM FLANAGAN
HOPE FACTORY TEAM ENDURO RACER

“ Our yearly pilgrimage to the land of baguettes and croissants is a classic. After race cancellations and very nearly group tears during the bitterly cold summer of 2014, we had everything crossed for sunshine, marmots and happiness for our 2015 adventure.

The vest was cracked out just below Birmingham, cruise control was set high upon landing in Calais and we were soon deep in the Alps, staring up at the mountains that'd be our home for the next month.

Pulling into Briançon late, we pulled our battered steeds out of the van and employed the classic 'point at an Alp and find a way up it' technique.

“WE ROLLED INTO A WILD, TWISTING MAZE OF BUTTERY SMOOTH TRAIL”

After some lung-burning steep, loose climbs and cliff edge carrying, we reached one of the hilltop forts that flank the city. Not sure what to expect but already satisfied following a breathtaking sunset, we rolled into a wild, twisting dusk maze of buttery smooth trail laid out in a perfect ribbon down the bone dry hillside.

Riding the trail as it came – no timing, no pressure – it all made sense. This is what every mountain biker should do with their summers – step away from the braking bump infested bike park mould, boycott the rammed lifts, park up, maybe purchase a map if getting lost makes you uneasy, and get the hell out there for a good old-fashioned explore!

”



Minnaar the winnaar!

14 years, 12 countries
18 World Cup wins

If anyone was going to unseat Steve Peat from his reign as the 'winningest' male World Cup racer of all time, it was always going to be his close friend – and this month's cover star – Greg Minnaar. But after three years without a win, it looked like the South African might never overtake his Santa Cruz Syndicate teammate. That all changed in Fort William this year, when he notched up his 17th victory to draw level with his old pal. Taking a second win in Lenzerheide, Switzerland, cemented his position as the most successful World Cup racer of all time, with 18 wins – not to mention three World Championship gold medals – to his credit. What makes this phenomenal run of wins even more remarkable is that his winning streak started a full 14 years ago, aged just 19. ⚙️

2009
Bromont,
Canada, DH

2011
La Bresse,
France, DH

2005
Willingen,
Germany, DH

2003 Fort William,
Scotland, 4X
2004 Fort William, 4X
2008 Fort William, DH
2009 Fort William, DH
2011 Fort William, DH
2015 Fort William, DH

2010
Leogang,
Austria, DH

2005
Balneário,
Brazil, DH

2015
Lenzerheide,
Switzerland, DH

2010
Maribor,
Slovenia, DH

2008
Mont-Sainte-Anne,
Canada, DH



Photo: Keith Valentine

A^{TO} Z

OF MOUNTAIN BIKING

2001
Kaprun,
Austria, DH

2008
Canberra,
Australia, DH

2009
Pietermaritzburg,
South Africa, DH
2012
Pietermaritzburg,
DH

J Juliana Furtado

You may not be familiar with the name Juliana Furtado, but you should be! The American's quiet nature meant she tended to stay out of the limelight, but she was the first female world champion and without her the sport probably wouldn't be the same today.

Juliana switched to mountain biking after multiple knee operations stopped her skiing competitively. She won the first Mountain Bike World Championships in 1991 and dominated women's racing in the early days of the sport.

The XC podium pretty much belonged to Furtado in the early '90s. As well as the 1991 and '92 World Championships she won five national championships and plenty of World Cup victories between '91 and '97.

Juliana was forced to retire from racing when she was diagnosed with lupus, an autoimmune disease that causes fatigue, joint pain and rashes, as well as affecting

the skin's ability to deal with sunlight. She's still able to ride though.

Furtado always wanted to set up a brand selling bikes designed specifically for women. Moving to Santa Cruz and meeting Rob Roskopp, the man behind Santa Cruz Bicycles, gave her the opportunity she was looking for. The original Santa Cruz Juliana was released in 1999 and was one of the first women's specific MTBs.

Juliana Bikes was launched in 2013 as a sister brand to Santa Cruz and now has a full line-up of bikes which share their frames with Santa Cruz counterparts but have female-specific components and build kits.



SECOND COACH GET SOME AIR

There are four main contributing factors for getting air – balance, speed, timing and pop. If you're struggling on the jumps then try to work out which of these you're missing, because without all four you'll find it hard to get any height.

2 Timing To get maximum height, make sure you pop off the highest part of the lip. Too early and you'll effectively be jumping from the bottom of the lip.

3 Balance If your body isn't in a balanced position on the bike you'll struggle to push hard and pop, and you'll probably end up going sideways.

4 Pop Practise your bunnyhop because it's a very similar move. The harder you pop, the higher you'll go.

1 Speed Your speed affects how much pop you'll need to generate off the lip. On most jumps, less speed means you'll need more pop, more speed means less pop.



Still mystified?
We'll have a
full technique
feature on
jumping in next
month's mag.

THE BEST OF...

SHREWSBURY

As Shropshire's mountain bike nucleus, you're never far from an amazing trail when you're in Shrewsbury. The surrounding countryside is littered with quality riding spots so it's not surprising that the county has become a breeding ground for world-class racers, including Gee Atherton and Neil Donoghue, as well as being home to an army of devoted trail riders and builders.



THE LOCAL
A force of nature when it comes to all things Shrewsbury, Shropshire and MTB, **Sandy Plenty** of The Trailhead Bicycle Co has been there, done that and got the T-shirt in every colour going. When he isn't talking about or riding bikes you can find him ploughing fields for fun – this guy is crazy about John Deere tractors!
www.trailhead.co.uk



ACCOMMODATION

In the centre of town the Sandford House Hotel (www.sandfordhouse.co.uk) offers rooms from £60, has safe bike storage and, more importantly, is only two minutes from the Nag's Head pub. Alternatively, the Premier Inn (www.premierinn.com) is a good bet and offers a slap-up breakfast, which isn't to be sniffed at!



TRAILS

With so many great spots within a 20-minute drive of town, it's hard to list them all. Eastridge is where it all started, with its superlative technical singletrack. The Long Mynd is perfect for longer and more physical XC rides. Alternatively, local trail builders have taken their work underground – see if you can find the Man Handler, Pub Crawl or the infamous Kirky's Corner. If you pop into The Trailhead armed with cake and a map, we may just show you some of the hidden gems!



ENTERTAINMENT

The Blind Tiger bar in the centre of town (www.theblindtigerbar.co.uk) has a huge selection of tasty beers, a good attitude and a relaxed feel. The 1920s prohibition style low lighting is just what's needed after a tough day shredding. Another top spot is the Nag's Head on the Wyle Cop (nagshheadpontesbury.co.uk). Don't be surprised to bump into like-minded mountain bikers – anything goes in this pub.



FOOD

Great for breakfast, lunch or dinner, The Pantry – just off the high street – is a rider owned cafe by day and a Mexican cantina by night. I recommend the (Sandy special) wet burrito. My other favourite cafe/beer den is Chez Sophie, again just off the high street, which dishes out some quality crepes and craft ale.

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★★★★★ What Cycle?



905 £1599



MBR Magazine



909 £1999

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whyte.bike

WHYTE
PERFORMANCE BY DESIGN

THE DIRTY DEBATE

We grapple with the big questions facing mountain biking

Do 29ers make the best trail bikes?



NO

Rob Weaver, *MBUK's*
Tech Ed in Chief

Now don't get me wrong, I'm actually a big fan of 29in wheels for the most part. They're fast as hell and still fun to ride. The big downside is just how flexy they can be. This, for me at least, really can hinder what could potentially be an amazing bike. Get the wrong set of big wheels and things can feel vague and unpredictable through

THINGS CAN FEEL VAGUE AND UNPREDICTABLE THROUGH THE TURNS, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT'S STEEP

the turns, especially when the going gets steep. There's no reason why a 29er trail bike can't be ridden like a 650b wheeled trail bike, but it tends to require a bit more cash – in some cases, quite a lot more – being spent on a set of stiffer wheels, which isn't ideal when you've just emptied your wallet on a flash new rig. Maybe the new, wider Boost hub standard from SRAM will remedy this somewhat.

We'll just have to wait and see.



YES

Seb Stott, *MBUK*
Test Team member

Despite the extra weight and flex of 29in wheels, the ability to carry more speed over rough ground has proven an overwhelming advantage for virtually all XC racers and many trail shredders too. Most 29ers are still too steep and too short in the front end, and many big wheels are too flexy for aggressive cornering, so you can see why 29ers have struggled to find a foothold in longer-travel applications. But now that 29ers are getting more progressive geometry and Boost hubs, big wheels can finally reach their huge potential for fast and efficient riding

MORE PROGRESSIVE GEOMETRY MEANS BIG WHEELS CAN FINALLY REACH THEIR HUGE POTENTIAL

fun! With 29ers leading both the men's and women's Enduro World Series title chases at the time of going to press, under Tracy Moseley and Justin Leov, could we be on the verge of a wagon wheeled revolution?

KNOW YOUR BIKE

UNLOCKING THE TECHNICAL JARGON TO EXPLAIN HOW OUR BIKES WORK

REAR MECHS

CAGE

This is the part of the mech that contains the jockey wheels and takes up any slack in the chain. Long cages are needed for wide gear ranges, medium cages are less vulnerable to crash damage if you have a single- or twin-ring transmission, and short cages are specific to DH and freeride bikes.



CLUTCH

Many modern mechs (Shimano Shadow Plus, SRAM Type 2) contain a 'clutch' mechanism that adds resistance to stop the cage swinging forward over rough ground. This helps stop the chain bashing into the chainstays or bouncing off the chainrings.



ADJUSTMENT

Cable tension affects how smoothly the gears shift, the 'high' and 'low' limit screws let you restrict the mech's range of movement so the chain isn't pushed into the wheel or frame, and the B-tension screw sets the vertical distance between the top jockey wheel and cassette.



What's your view? Tell us which wheel size you think is best for trail bikes

www.facebook.com/mbukmag
<http://twitter.com/mbukmagazine>



THANK GOD FOR...

CHAIN-RETAINING CHAINRINGS

FEW UPGRADES HAVE come close to the popularity of the chain-retaining single ring in recent years. The concept of a sprocket with alternating narrow and wide teeth isn't new, but SRAM's German transmission department were the first to harness this technology for mountain bike use with their X-SYNC ring, launched as part of the all singing, all dancing XX1 groupset back in 2013. Other brands soon jumped on the idea, realising that for many riders it would remove the need to run a separate chain device. The market is now filled with options, some similar to SRAM's design, others delivering a different take on the concept or added features, such as those from Renthal (extra machining to help with mud shedding), MRP (alternating left, middle and right teeth) and Shimano (extra-long, hooked teeth). The X-SYNC ring is still the benchmark though, and SRAM's latest GX groupset has brought the technology down to a much more affordable level. ⚙️

STAY SAFE

It's easy to get caught up in the fun of riding, but a tragic death on the trails has brought home just how dangerous mountain biking can potentially be. Fifty-year-old Mark Kingston, a dad of two from Bracknell, died from his injuries after crashing on the Red 25 trail at Swinley Forest in July. Our thoughts go out to his friends and family. This sad news is a reminder of how important it is to be safe out on the trails. Here are some basic precautions you can take to reduce the risks.

FLASHBACK

1991 FLEDGLING EVENT

WHEN THE UCI added DH racing to the World Cup series in 1991, MSA in Canada was one of the headline venues with its wide open, flat out sections and gnarlier (for the day!) wooded bits. The pros would hurtle down the hill on XC bikes in full Lycra, with seats so high they were practically pushing them over the bars! With big names like Tomac, Rockwell and Giove on the scene, the racing was wild... and the parties even wilder!



THAT WAS THEN THIS IS NOW!

#58 Mont-Sainte-Anne World Cup

2015 CLASSIC VENUE

FAST-FORWARD TO 2015 – the 25th anniversary of World Cup racing at MSA – and things are very different. The bikes are long-travel, lightweight, carbon fibre pieces of art, the track is much more technical and the riders wear baggy, motocross inspired clothing. Riders like Hill and Gwin have taken racing to a whole new level, while Ratboy's on hand to ensure the partying's still wild!



1 If you're riding alone, tell someone where you're going, the route you'll be taking and what time you'll be back. It's always safer to ride with others – and more fun too!



2 Avoid unmarked and unofficial trails if riding alone – it's much easier for the emergency services to find you on signposted and/or mapped trails and/or bridledways than 'secret' singletrack.



3 Always carry a first aid kit and spare layers. If someone has a crash you may be able to help, and extra clothing is a must – accident victims can get cold very quickly.



4 Wear appropriate protection for the trails you're going to be riding. A helmet and gloves are a must, add knee pads for faster/more technical trails and a full-face lid and extra protection for DH.



5 Have a mobile with you in case you need to phone for help. A smartphone with GPS or a separate GPS bike computer will enable you to give paramedics an accurate location.



Summer Clearance

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RATING

OVERALL
8

MBUK Magazine



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LIVING THE DREAM

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES FROM THOSE WHO'VE SUCCESSFULLY TURNED MOUNTAIN BIKING INTO MORE THAN JUST A HOBBY

Matt Legg-Bagg & Sam Fowler Pedal Progression

In the bike mad city of Bristol, no two individuals encapsulate mountain biking quite like Matt and Sam. Two distinct personalities with a single passion for all things off-road and two-wheeled, their enthusiasm is infectious, and they've put this energy to good use with their business, Pedal Progression. Over to Matt and Sam...

Sam and I worked in retail together and neither of us saw our future within four walls. Coming home from a season of riding in Canada in 2009 to see my dad, who was terminally ill, I began planning an off-road Land's End to John O'Groats trip to raise money for charity. Sam joined me, and when my dad passed away on the seventh day of the trip it became a real bonding experience. That ride was amazing on so many levels, and once back, we went bike mad, riding and racing whenever we could. One day it hit me – instead of wishing I was back in Canada, why not bring the life I'd had out there to Bristol?

We started the shop with minimal funds but made the most of what we had by using recycled materials, finding

bargains and roping in friends and family. From there it's just been about making sure we live what we preach and that's come pretty easily!

Great service will be what sustains local bike shops in the internet age. There's no substitute for one-to-one interaction. We offer coaching, workshop service and bike hire, and always strive to do what the internet can't. We're experts, and not through YouTube but by living it. This helps us give the right advice to our customers. We're here smiling with our doors open seven days a week. We're always keen to chat, offer advice and help out. You'll also find us digging at the local trails, putting on races and events, and getting involved in the local scene, and all because we love it. You just don't get that with online bike shops.

The biggest challenge with coaching is for riders to realise that they need it. So many people we speak to are convinced they just need new stuff to conquer the trail. We understand that all brands have to market their products (us included) but it seems that in the current climate, coaching gets overlooked and shiny new kit is favoured.

When you start a business there has to be an element of throwing mud to see what sticks. There's no point putting time and energy into something you think is cool but no one else is interested in.

It's important to keep getting better at what you're good at. Many companies try to grow too quickly, running all the ideas they have instead of focusing on nailing one thing at a time.

Looking ahead, we've just launched an online shop and been in touch with Red Bull about bringing a new and exciting event to Bristol – our lips are sealed on that one! Sam will continue to head up the Belmont Riders Association, liaising with the Forestry Commission to build one of the best downhill and freeride parks in the South West. We're also about to push

You'll find us digging, putting on events and getting involved. You don't get that with online shops

the Support Your Local Bike Shop campaign again, giving some more of our Morvélo #SYLBS tees to local shops. The rest is classified!

Running your own business can be extremely challenging and mean sacrificing doing the things you enjoy with the people you love. Matt and I have had our differences of opinion too. These are the only bad points about working at Pedal Progression though. We're stoked to get to do what we love every day. 🌀

MBUK RETAIL THERAPY

Carry on camping

Despite what you may have heard, bikepacking isn't just cycle touring for hipsters! The right gear will let you get in touch with your inner Bear Grylls and spend some quality time out in the hills with your beloved MTB



PETZL NAO HEADTORCH

See the light, and lots of it! Useful on or off the bike. £135 www.petzl.com

Ditch the bounce

Any bike can be used for bikepacking but most experienced adventurers choose a hardtail or even a fully rigid bike because that means less weight and less to go wrong. Fatbikes and plus-size bikes are increasingly popular. For more info, head on over to www.bearbonesbikepacking.co.uk.



1

2

3



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3 WILDCAT GEAR OCELOT, MOUNTAIN LION AND TIGER FRAME BAG BUNDLE

Wildcat's frame bags let you strap all your worldly goods to your ride without the need for racks and panniers. Velcro tabs make for quick and easy set-up on almost any bike. Once loaded, weight is distributed evenly, keeping the bike surprisingly responsive on the trail. All Wildcat bags are handmade in Wales and there are plenty of custom options on their website.

From £200 (depending on size)
www.wildcatgear.co.uk

KNOW THE LAW

GET OFF MY LAND!

In the UK, the right to wild camp only exists in Scotland and on Dartmoor – elsewhere, you'll need to get the permission of the landowner. When sleeping out, always follow these simple rules:

- Pitch camp out of sight of roads and footpaths.
- Make camp late and pack up early.
- Avoid conflict with landowners. If they ask you to leave, do so.
- Leave no sign you were there. Take your litter home and don't light open fires.



Photo: Steve Behr

INDUSTRY INSIDER

TODD SEPLAVY

GT BICYCLES' DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

Todd Seplavy, aka @ska_todd, is a bike industry mogul who worked for the likes of Specialized, Iron Horse and Evil before moving to his current role at GT. We caught up with him on the wettest Welsh hillside known to man. Here's what he had to say...

New York native

I was born, raised and reside on Long Island, home to the eastern suburbs of New York City. I'm the Director of Product Management and Product Manager for the full-suspension mountain bike category at GT – that means all the exciting bikes

like the Sanction, Force and Sensor. It's a really exciting job. I get to travel the world and make new friends while riding my bike!

Ska fan

In my spare time I'm usually having fun with my kids, watching the Mets lose baseball games or enjoying some live music, especially ska, punk and indie music. I'm also a self-confessed washed-up downhill.

Groms and dudettes

Things that are getting me really excited at the moment include the ever improving capabilities of 130-150mm trail bikes, which now

have XC pedalability, DH geometry, powerful stoppers, great suspension and... traction! I also love the exploding number of groms [young kids] getting into the sport and the gear being designed for them. More women being involved in the industry is great too – it's becoming less of a dudefest!

Smiles per miles

Mountain biking is a sport that's born from the trails and riders. How us product guys or the media translate that into new gear or pretty pictures shakes out from what someone, somewhere on some trail needed to be doing or was inspired to do on a bike. We've now entered a third generation and evolutionary life cycle of the sport. There's going to be lots of morphing and twisting and turning – like the plus-size tyres, fatbikes and new industry standards – but at its soul, mountain biking is always about the smiles-per-miles ratio with you and your friends.



ROCKSHOX LYRIK

Will this hard-hitting fork have us waxing Lyrik-al?

Following on from the successful reworking of the Pike fork, RockShox set about overhauling its longer-travel brother, the Lyrik, keen to get it back up to speed and ready to be slapped on the front of the latest hard-riding trail/enduro/all-mountain bikes.

The new single-crown is available with 160, 170 or 180mm (6.3/6.7/7.1in) of travel in 650b guise and 150 or 160mm (5.9/6.3in) in 29er format. As well as the standard Solo Air spring there's a Dual Position Air option for those who like to adjust their travel, and you can now use Bottomless Token volume spacers to adjust the progressivity of the DPA stroke.

Like the Pike, the new Lyrik has 35mm stanchions, but RockShox have beefed them up internally. The lower legs are tapered and asymmetrical (this increases the negative spring volume, improving sensitivity), the arch has been plumped up and SRAM's new Torque Cap technology – a larger interface between the hub end caps and fork dropouts – boosts stiffness even further. If you're looking to go wide with your wheels, fear not – the Lyrik comes in Boost (15x110mm) versions too.

The new fork gets the same highly rated Charger damper as the Pike and higher-end Boxer forks, along with the same SKF wiper and cartridge seals, designed to minimise friction. If you like to tinker, you can tune the rebound damping via internal shims.

We rode the battered slopes of Les Deux Alpes aboard a 180mm version of the fork and were impressed by the supple, smooth and controlled stroke. Claimed weight for the 650b Lyrik is an impressive 2,005g. The new fork will set you back £824 (RCT3 Solo Air) or £888 (RCT3 Dual Position Air).



VISION STATEMENT



MARIN 30TH ANNIVERSARY DEMO TOUR

To celebrate our 30TH Anniversary we're running a UK Demo Tour. Come and check out just why Marin have been at the forefront of mountain bike design for three decades.

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New for
2016

LAPIERRE ZESTY

Five ways the French brand have put the zest back in their classic trail bike

Rewind a few years and the Lapierre Zesty's great geometry and well-controlled suspension meant it was the top trail bike to have. Times changed and rivals caught up, but this all-new pair of bikes could put the French brand back on top. Here's why...

1

LIGHTER THAN EVER

By moving the shock mount from the down tube to the top tube and getting rid of the shock shuttle, Lapierre have managed to drop 540g from their top carbon fibre frame, which also comes pre-pimped with titanium bolts. The alloy-framed models have lost weight too – though the 50g saved is equivalent to a Mars Bar.

2

SLIMMER AND TRIMMER

Not only has the frame been on a diet but the notoriously wide-hipped stance of the previous bike's back end has also been trimmed down, giving much more heel clearance. You also get 10mm more mud clearance around the tyre – something vital for any UK trail bike worth its salt.

3

ONE WHEEL FITS ALL

Last year's Zesty came in a TR spec with 29in wheels and 120mm (4.7in) of travel and an AM spec with 650b wheels and 150mm (5.9in) of travel. The 2016 AM keeps the same wheel size and travel but the TR has been replaced with a 650b XM model with a 130/120mm (5.1/4.7in) travel split. Lapierre said they loved their big-wheeled bike but they just didn't sell that many.

4

WRANGLER ANGLES

Lapierre aren't bucking the trend for longer and slacker bikes – the new Zestys have longer top tubes paired with shorter stems. That means a medium XM frame now has a 610mm top tube and a 66.5-degree head angle for more confident high-speed handling. All the bikes get wider bars too – 760mm for the AM and 740mm for the XM.

5

SUSPENSION SHAKE-UP

As you'd expect from a company that keeps 10-time downhill world champion Nico Vouilloz on hand to develop their suspension, the rear end has been further refined. That means a more progressive end stroke to give extra support and control when things get really rowdy.

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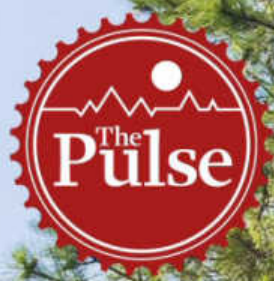
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New for
2016

Our man Seb puts the Loki through its paces in Spain. This thing eats rock steps for breakfast!

ORBEA LOKI

'Semi-skimmed' hardtail from Spain

Plus-size wheels and tyres are the opinion divider of the moment. Some say 'semi-fat' 2.8 to 3in rubber and wide rims are the future, but the prospect of yet another wheel size rolling onto the scene has others up in arms. Spanish brand Orbea fall into the former camp, at least when it comes to fun and relatively affordable hardtails. The Loki, seen here, is their take on the plus-size concept. Designed to be an ideal first mountain bike, it can fit either 650b+ or 29in wheels between its short 430mm chainstays and is equipped with a 120mm (4.7in) fork and slack 67-degree head angle for confident descending.

NO SUSPENSION? NO PROBS

In Ainsa, Spain, we got to ride the 'semi-skimmed' hardtail (as opposed to full-fat fatbike) on the same rough, rocky trails as some of Orbea's full-suspension trail bikes. Here, the Loki shone. Run at 15-17psi, the

huge tyres provided incredible traction on the loose terrain while absorbing bumps too, making technical climbing comfortable and relatively easy.

On the downhills, the playful geometry and compliant tyres allowed us to keep pace with the full-suspension bikes, almost making us forget the lack of back end bounce until we hit a drop or G-out. For a hardtail, the Loki is a seriously impressive descender.

TAKE YOUR PICK

Yes, the loose, rocky conditions suited the big tyres well, and we'd be interested to see how they'd cope in mud, but after testing the Loki side-by-side with full-sussers, it's shown us what 650b+ tyres can do. We're impressed! There'll be five Loki models – two equipped with regular 29in hoops and three with 650b+ wheels. Prices will range from £1,039 to £2,159 and they're expected to hit shops in the autumn.



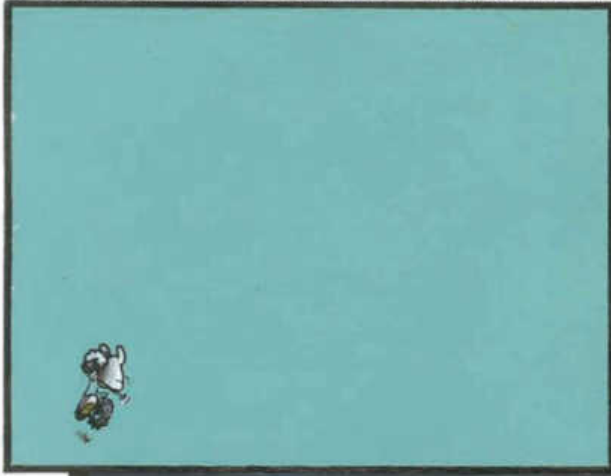
The 120mm travel fork and massive front tyre make light work of rough and loose terrain



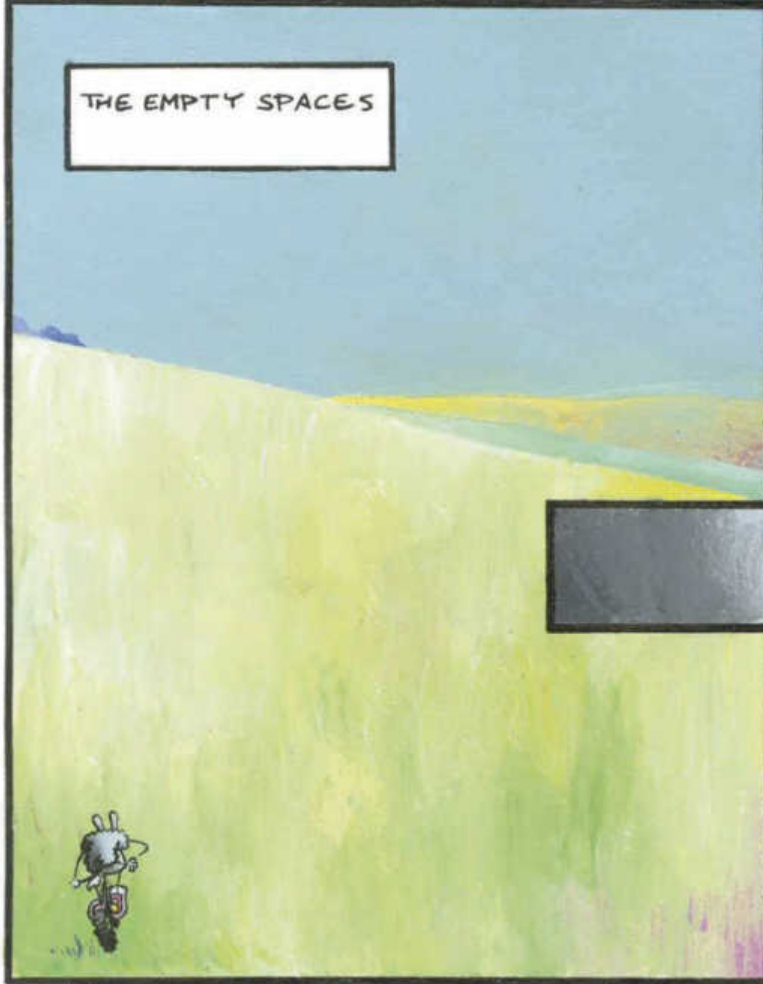
The Loki is compatible with 650b+ and 29in wheels – pick the former for comfort and grip, the latter for XC speed

On the downhills, the playful geometry and compliant tyres allowed us to keep pace with the full-sus bikes

YOU CAN TAKE MY HAND IN THE DARKNESS DARLING WHEN YOU NEED A FRIEND AND IT CAN CHANGE IN SHAPE OR FORM, BUT NEVER CHANGE IN SIZE



SOMETIMES



THE EMPTY SPACES



FILL



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THE EMPTY SPACES

MINT SAUCE

ALL OR NOTHING

DB

The Myers range of all mountain 27.5", 140mm travel hard tails are the gravity oriented all mountain riders dream machine. When we set out designing this range, we wanted a bike which takes us back to why we love mountain biking originally; FUN. The Myers is a bike that's at home tearing down a hill side run, or ripping through the single track at a trail center.

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AND RANTS



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Email: mbuk@bikeradar.com Visit: www.bikeradar.com/forums

★ MBUK STAR LETTER



While sorting my garage out recently I stumbled across my old MBUK

Wrecking Crew membership card and some old photos and I couldn't stop grinning! They must be from the mid '90s. I've still got the T-shirt too and have been an avid reader of the mag throughout. Bikes have come and gone since then but I'm still addicted at 44 and currently shredding on my Commencal Meta. My 10-year-old daughter has caught the bug too and become partial to a quick blast on the Orange Ms Isle I had ready and waiting for her (now that her feet reach the floor!). Keep up the good work guys, and here's



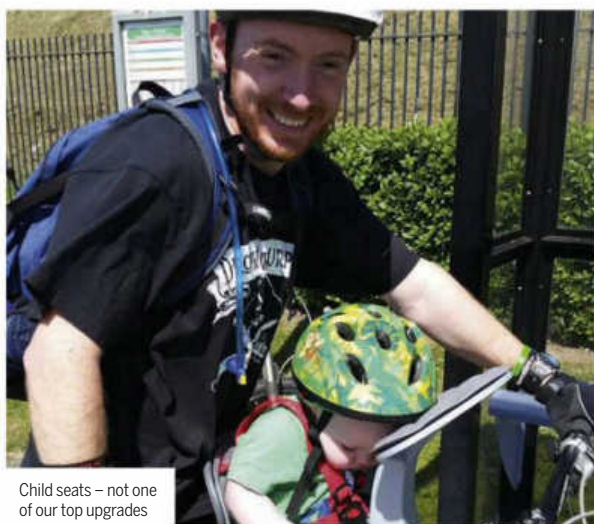
Here's Gary pulling an old-skool one-hander on his Scott Neva somewhere back in the mists of time (1998)

to another 20 years of wrecking!
GARY MILLER, VIA EMAIL
Now there's a blast from the past! Our Wrecking Crew's a bit smaller these days but

the ethos is the same – getting out into the hills and having a rad time with people who are just as crazy about bikes as we are!



If your letter gets picked as the Star Letter, you'll receive a pair of DMR Vault pedals worth £99.99, courtesy of Upgrade (www.upgradebikes.co.uk). For full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions, see p10.



Child seats – not one of our top upgrades

Parenting tips

During ride-outs this year I've noticed that the front end of my bike feels heavy and less responsive. Do you think a wider bar and shorter stem would fix it, or are lighter wheels necessary?

DAVID BROUGHTON, GRIMSBY
There appears to be a small human attached to your top tube. Why not strap him to the down tube instead? It'll lower the bike's centre of gravity, improving the handling, and he'll double up as a handy mudguard.

Out of date advice

I've seen at least two articles this year where you advise

people heading to Scotland that the locals swear by Avon Skin So Soft. We don't, because it hasn't worked since Avon changed the ingredients. If you want your skin to feel as greasy as a sausage supper and be covered in drowned midges, then buy Skin So Soft. If you want to keep the midges away with the added bonus of smelling nice and feeling non-greasy, then you want Smidge, which is what the locals actually buy.

JOE NEWSON, FORT WILLIAM
We've checked with our resident Scotsman, Seb Stott, and he tells us you're absolutely right, so apologies for the outdated advice. We used to get some pretty odd looks at Boots when we turned up at the checkout with an armful of Avon bottles so

SOCIAL STUFF

@ MBUK FORUM

www.bikeradar.com/forums

New bike – what to do before riding?

Check the contact points are OK for you, everything is tightened up, the gears are properly indexed and the suspension sag and rebound set – **reformedfatty**

Take a photo of it – it'll be the only time it looks new! – **JodyP**

Take the bell and reflectors off – **LouDog**

Tell your missus you won't be back for dinner – **kinioo**

f FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/MBUKMag

Ever ripped a tyre clean off the rim?

I've ripped a tyre and snapped a frame in half, but the bike was one I built myself out of spare parts so that would explain that! – **Jordan David Mort**

I ripped the tyre off the front wheel in a berm. I ended up on my knees, not knowing what had happened – **Uros Langus**

No, but I've ripped myself clean off the frame before! – **James Lister**

TWITTER

http://twitter.com/mbukmagazine

Next MTBing craze?

Fat middle-aged blokes pushing £6k bikes up hills with no shame, by the looks of it – **Will Vaughan**

28in wheels. Got to sell those new bikes every year – **Jonny Hayden**

Deciding on one something! – **Paul Oates**

The small print

Email your letters and photos to mbuk@bikeradar.com.

- The 'Star Photo' winner will receive a Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive pump worth £89.99.
- The 'That's Gotta Hurt' winner will receive a Lezyne Port A Shop toolkit worth £99.99.
- The 'Hardcore Heroes' winner will receive an Effetto Mariposa Caffelatex Tubeless Conversion Kit worth £49.99.

Turn to p10 for full Mountain Biking UK terms and conditions.

we're more than happy to make the switch to Smidge!

Sore but loving it

After a 13-year break from cycling I've become the proud owner of a Whyte 801. My stomach has decreased and so has my number of chins, down to two, but I feel like I've been buggered by King Kong! Most of my riding is commuting to work but I live for the weekends, when I leave the road riding to the Lycra-clad leg shavers. I'd like to thank you all at MBUK for reigniting my passion for bikes and reteaching me lost skills. If this is my midlife crisis then bring it on!

RICHARD SENIOR, VIA EMAIL
Glad to be of service, Richard. Oh, and if you want to avoid the 'brutalised by a giant ape' sensation and actually be able to sit down without wincing, we can highly recommend investing in some decent undershorts and a good dollop of chammy cream!

No more stopping

While riding the Blade trail at Afan my mate got a flat tyre. When I stopped to help I was attacked by midges but they left him alone. From now on it's Top Gear rules and I'll leave him behind!

JASON WEYMOUTH, VIA EMAIL
Ouch. Best smother some midge repellent on your legs next time. Apparently the Scots swear by Smidge...



That's what you get for stopping to help out a mate...



DWIGHT BOTTOMLEY's not going to be giving any high fives for a while after pulling an involuntary Superman at Llandegla and landing fingers first.

WIN Lezyne tool package



Twelve year old **DOWIE EVANS** wins this month's prize with this big old whip at Tavi Woods in Devon. Pic by his dad, **ADRIAN**



★ MBUK STAR PHOTO

WHAT YOU COULD WIN...

The Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive track pump is made from durable CNC machined aluminium and has an oversized barrel, piston, hose and connectors to deliver twice as much air per stroke and quickly fill tyres or seat tubeless tyre systems. For more info, visit www.upgradebikes.co.uk.



JOE SMITH, 13, shreds the North 40 trail in Moab, Utah



SAM WILLIAMS gets a bit of practice in at Wentwood in South Wales before heading to the Alps



SIMON TARR took this GoPro selfie of himself riding his Lapierre Zesty at Haldon Forest in Devon



OLI EDWARDS hits his local trails on the Mendips after recovering from a broken elbow



DAN GIBSON from Durham took this snap of his Santa Cruz Bronson while riding the alternative Torridon loop in Scotland



SHANE MASON says: "My girlfriend **ABI FINNEGAN** wanted to get into riding so I took her to Bedgebury trail centre. All was going well until the last trail, The Cake Run. I'll let the photo do the talking!"



Nice style from **ANDREW BUTLER**, but the real Hardcore Hero here is his mate **LOCHIE SPOTSWOOD**, calmly sipping a cuppa and catching up on the news while he soars overhead!

WIN Effetto tubeless kit



TWEETS OF THE MONTH



Sometimes you just need to bolt on a coil and go send some DH laps. Thanks @fox for making my bike awesome!

#remedy29 #lesgetsbikepark – Enduro World

Series star **Justin Leov**

transforms his Trek from enduro bike to mini downhill bike to conquer the braking bumps of the Portes du Soleil



Gatesgarth Pass yesterday
#northernrocktour

– who needs the Alps when Britain boasts trails like this?

Not **Ed Oxley**



Home for the week and finally picked some frames up for these jerseys from last year... Now where to put them? – Wherever **Manon**

Carpenter decides to hang her World Cup and World

Championships jerseys, she'd better leave space for plenty more...



One-foot scrubs don't get much more steezy than

Ollie Jones's! #Inthezone

@WhistlerBikePrk – ace snapper **Laurence**

Crossman-Emms isn't wrong...



INSTAGRAM

<http://instagram.com/mbukmagazine>



@alexcutler123 rocks a pants and pads combo to beat the heat



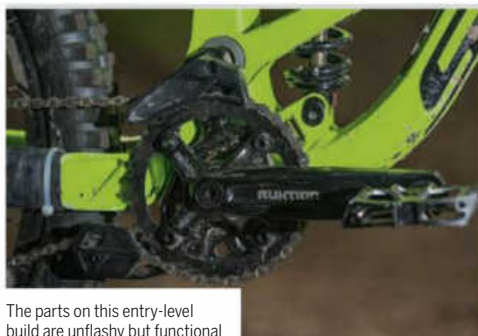
Who needs wallpaper when you've got Mint Sauce? Not @sbccycles of Hackney



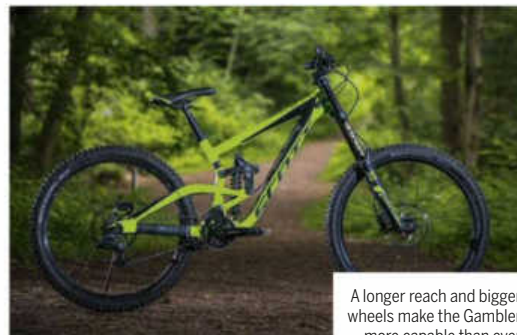
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WHERE YOU REALLY HAVE TO COMMIT,
BOOSTING CONFIDENCE WITH EVERY RUN**

FirstRides **MBUK**

FEATURING: Scott Gambler 730 // Canfield Balance // Norco Aurum C7.3



The parts on this entry-level build are unflashy but functional



A longer reach and bigger wheels make the Gambler more capable than ever

SCOTT GAMBLER 730

FRAME Hydroformed 6061 aluminium, 210mm (8.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Boxxer RC, 203mm (8in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Van R **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X4 rear mech and X5 shifter, Truvativ Ruktion 1.0 cranks and e*thirteen LG1 chain guide (1x10) **WHEELSET** Syncros MD25 rims on Formula DHL hubs, Schwalbe Magic Mary Evolution Super Gravity VertStar (F) and TrailStar (R) 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano M506 **BAR/STEM** Syncros DH1.5, 800mm/Syncros DH1.5, 42-47mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Syncros FL2.0/Syncros MTB Trail **WEIGHT** 17.4kg (38.3lb), size large without pedals **PRICE** £2,499 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com

The Gambler has proven popular with bike park senders and privateer racers. For 2015, Scott have moved from 26in to 650b wheels and made the front end a little longer, giving a more race-orientated feel. Don't worry though, it's still lots of fun!

The frame

As well as extending the reach of the frame (by 11mm on the large size) Scott have reworked those complicated looking suspension linkages. There's now significantly less rotation of the eyelet bushings, reducing wear and friction. The leverage curve has been tweaked too, but still errs on the plush rather than progressively racy side. Chainstay length (421mm to 440mm) and BB height (343mm to 353mm) are adjustable to suit the rider.

The kit

The componentry is solid for the price. High points include the RockShox Boxxer RC fork and Fox Van R shock – both fit-and-forget performers. The Shimano brakes may be budget offerings but they deliver ample

power and consistency. The Schwalbe tyres on our test bike were let down by skinny SnakeSkin – not the advertised Super Gravity – sidewalls.

The ride

Planted – that's how the Gambler feels on the trail. In the low setting, the BB height is very low indeed at 343mm. Combined with the slack 63-degree head angle and reasonably roomy front centre, this means your weight is kept firmly between the wheels when attacking technical terrain. Add immense grip and trustworthy brakes, and the Gambler thrives on steep lines where you really have to commit, boosting confidence with every run.

The Boxxer fork is supple and controlled so long as the spring is supportive enough for you (if not, and you wind on too much compression damping instead of fitting a heavier spring, it soon starts to feel harsh) and the custom-tuned shock works with the mildly progressive linkage and rearward axle path to deliver terrain-swallowing plushness. There isn't much in the way of mid-stroke support, making the

Gambler rather wallowy, but the high main pivot helps reduce pedal-induced bob.

The Magic Mary tyres are draggy but grip tenaciously in virtually all conditions. The SnakeSkin sidewalls are pop prone and squirm when pushed hard, but Scott assure us production bikes will come with tougher Super Gravity casings.

While we stuck with the low-and-slack BB setting, we did experiment with chainstay length. The shorter option is great for tight tracks or smaller, less aggressive riders because it makes the bike easier to manual and change direction. Bigger riders who are OK muscling the bike around will benefit from the longer setting though – it balances the roomy front triangle, boosting front end traction and making rear wheel steering more predictable. **SEB**

FirstRides **RATED**

Relaxed angles and plush suspension add up to a planted feel that encourages you to roll the dice. Superb on steep terrain



FirstRides Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE



EXCEPTIONAL:

A genuine class leader



VERY GOOD: One of the best you can buy



GOOD: It'll do the job and do it well



BELOW AVERAGE: Flawed in some way



POOR: Simply put, don't bother!



- ↑ The Balance shows a lot of promise, but try before you buy as sizing is quite small
- ↓ Take some time to get the shock dialled in and the suspension action is excellent



CANFIELD BALANCE

FRAME 6061 aluminium, 160mm (6.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 160mm (6.3in) travel **SHOCK** Cane Creek DBAir CS **DRIVETRAIN** Shimano Deore XT w/ Canfield AM/DH cranks (1x10) **WHEELSET** Stan's ZTR Flow EX rims on True Precision Stealth hubs, Schwalbe Hans Dampf 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Ritchey WCS, 760mm/Ritchey WCS, 45mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Rockshox Reverb Stealth/Canfield **WEIGHT** 14.5kg (32lb), size large with pedals **PRICE** £1,790 (frame only) **CONTACT** Cranknuts www.cranknuts.com

Canfield Brothers may not be a name you're familiar with but the brand have been around since 1999, run by two American siblings, Lance and Chris, who've been pro racers and hucked their way through Red Bull Rampage. The Balance is their first foray into the 650b-wheeled, 160mm (6.3in) travel 'enduro' market, so we were excited to get it out into

the woods and find out just what it was capable of.

The frame

The Balance has been built around 650b wheels but Canfield are quick to point out that it's still 26in compatible with a longer fork bolted in. It uses their dual-link Formula suspension set-up. The aluminium frame has all the usual features you'd look for on an enduro rig – internal routing for a 'stealth' dropper post, a 12x142mm rear axle, ISCG mounts and a tapered head tube with 66-degree head angle.

The kit

Our test bike was a custom build, with plenty of parts from Canfield themselves, including their AM/DH cranks and Crampon pedals. A RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air fork took care of bump eating up front, while a Cane Creek DBAir shock

with Climb Switch was on duty out back. A 30t single chainring was matched to a 10-speed cassette, with a 40t range extender sprocket to keep the hills in check.

The ride

We initially tried a medium frame but found the reach, and consequently the front centre (the distance from the centre of the front hub to the centre of the bottom bracket), incredibly short. Swapping to a large frame – a somewhat surprising move for our 5ft 7in main tester – solved this problem nicely, though it meant we had an extra 51mm of seat tube between our legs. The 607mm effective top tube length gave enough cockpit room, though the reach was still fairly short, at 438mm.

Grinding our way up some big climbs, the 1x10 transmission with extra large cassette sprocket did the job well and

pedalling had little enough impact on the suspension action that although we tried the Climb Switch on the shock in the interests of testing, we didn't feel the need to use it 'in anger' at any point.

When up turned to down, the Balance's suspension action really shone. We had to get some advice on settings to get the Cane Creek shock's massive range of adjustment dialled in, but once we had it sorted there was plenty of small bump sensitivity as well as good bottom-out resistance to deal with harsh compressions.

The only issue we encountered – and now we're really picking holes – was that sometimes when we pushed deep into the stroke there was a short lag before the shock delivered the necessary support, but you're only likely to notice this if you're an aggressive rider riding full-on DH tracks on flat pedals. **JAKE**

FirstRides **RATED**

It's a shame the sizing isn't as dialled as the suspension, but the Balance is still a solid, fun bike to ride



↑ The raw finish of the Canfield's frame stands out in a sea of neon enduro bikes

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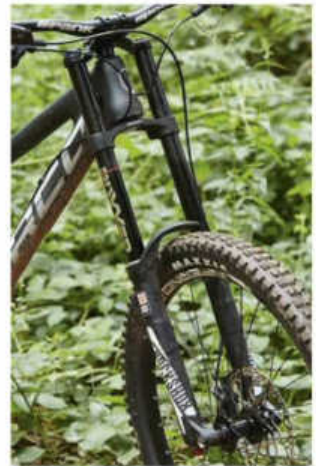
CEDRIC GRACIA

OG



↑ The low-slung Aurum is an easy bike to hop on and ride fast

↓ The Boxxer RC is a decent entry-level DH fork but can't match the feel of the rear end



NORCO AURUM C7.3

FRAME Carbon fibre front triangle/aluminium rear end, 200mm (7.9in) travel **FORK** RockShox Boxxer RC, 203mm (8in) travel **SHOCK** RockShox Kage RC **DRIVETRAIN** Shimano Zee w/ Race Face Respond DH cranks, e*thirteen LS1 chain guide and seven-speed cassette converter (1x7) **WHEELSET** SUNringlé Inferno 29 rims on Formula DH hubs, Maxxis Minion DHF (F) and DHR II (R) 3C 27.5x2.4in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Zee **BAR/STEM** Spank Spoon, 772mm/Spank Director, 50mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** SDG I-Beam/SDG I-Fly **WEIGHT** 17.8kg (39.2lb), size medium with pedals **PRICE** £2,900 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Evans Cycles www.evanscycles.com

The new, 650b wheeled Aurum should need no introduction if you're a fan of downhill racing. Fast-and-loose Kiwi Sam Blenkinsop and UK ripper Harry Heath have been piloting the carbon Norco on the World Cup scene with tons of steeze, and getting some tidy results too. We hopped on the cheapest of this year's three complete bikes and headed

straight for the gnar to find out whether this budget build is still race ready.

The frame

The 'C' in the Aurum's name refers to the chunky carbon front triangle, while the rear end is constructed from aluminium. The 200mm (7.9in) travel frame has a 142x12mm rear axle – a size more often seen on trail bikes – and wide PF107 bottom bracket. Neat touches include an integrated seat clamp, fork bumpers and down tube protector, plus some of the tidiest cable guides we've seen.

The kit

At £2,900 and with such a meticulously thought out frame, there's no room for bling on the C7.3. But despite the limited budget, it's obvious serious thought has gone into the build – the frame is kitted out with a mix of solid, reliable parts.

Shimano provide the Zee brakes and shifting gear, including a custom seven-speed cassette that has a neat spacer to stop the chain dropping into the wheel. Suspension wise, the RockShox Boxxer RC up front and Kage RC up back complement each other well, and the 3C compound Maxxis tyres aren't going to need changing after one ride either.

The ride

The Aurum's long wheelbase (1,210mm, size medium) and slack 63-degree head angle give piles of confidence, with the bike remaining stable through everything we could throw at it. It still turns well thanks to the central riding position and relatively short chainstays.

As an all-round DH performer, the Norco feels great and is an easy bike to hop on and ride fast, despite the relatively short effective top tube length

(571mm, size medium) and reach (413mm). The Spank bar is a sensible width and comfortable shape, and although it took us a serious amount of time to get the Zee brakes working properly, they haven't needed touching since.

Comfort and confidence is ramped up even more by the feel of the rear shock. Despite being a budget contender, the Kage feels incredibly plush at the start of the travel and ramps up as the hits get bigger. On steeper trails, the rear end felt perfect. On faster, harder hits we'd have liked a firmer compression tune though, even with the late-stroke progression built into the linkage.

The Boxxer RC's simplicity makes it great for less experienced riders but the fork can't match the sensitivity and support of the back end. We're hard pushed to complain about the overall package for the price though. **JAKE**

FirstRides **RATED**

Tons of fun and faster than most budget specced machines, whether you're out to race or just have some fun in the woods



↑ Finishing touches include a neat integrated seat clamp

Andrew **NEETHLING**

2015 UCI World Cup #1 - Lourdes

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mountain-bike **SUSPENSION**

MBUK First Look

*Tasty bits of new kit to
get excited about*



CORSAIR TORO

AFTER A BRIEF absence from the UK scene, freeride brand Corsair – best known for providing Cam Zink's 2010 Red Bull Rampage winning bike – are back with a new distributor and some fresh new frames, including the Toro seen here. This aluminium dirt jumper cum dual slalom and 4X racer is designed around a 100mm fork and comes in a single size, with a 69-degree head angle and 584mm effective top tube. The chunky tubeset features a tapered head tube, beefy CNC machined chainstay yoke, and neat integrated seat clamp, and adjustable dropouts mean you can run it geared or singlespeed and adjust the chainstay length by 12mm (395-407mm). It's available in bright blue or green, with complete bikes soon to follow.

£525 (frame only) Resurrection Cycle Products
www.resurrectioncycles.co.uk



SRAM GUIDE ULTIMATE BRAKE

THE ULTIMATE IS the latest addition to SRAM's Guide brake line-up and, as the name suggests, represents the pinnacle of the range. The biggest change is the new S4 calliper, which retains the powerful four-pot design of the other Guide brakes but gets a new piston material, longer pad 'pocket' and new heat shield to improve heat management on long descents. The bleed port has been repositioned, to reduce the risk of air contamination, and can now be locked for easier bleeding. There's a new two-piece rotor too, the levers have been upgraded from alloy to carbon and titanium hardware helps keep weight as low as possible

£229 per end Fisher Outdoor Leisure
www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk



NUKEPROOF KNEE PADS

NUKEPROOF HAVE TWO new knee pads for downhill and enduro riders. The Critical DH Pro pads, designed with the likes of team rider Sam Hill in mind, combine a plastic knee cup with soft shin protection to take the edge off rock and pedal strikes. The padding is attached to a breathable sleeve, with a mesh panel at the rear to let heat out and twin Velcro straps to hold it in place. The Critical-Lite enduro pads lose the hard knee cup and Velcro straps, and are shorter on the shin, sacrificing a little protection in return for increased comfort. Both are available in four sizes.

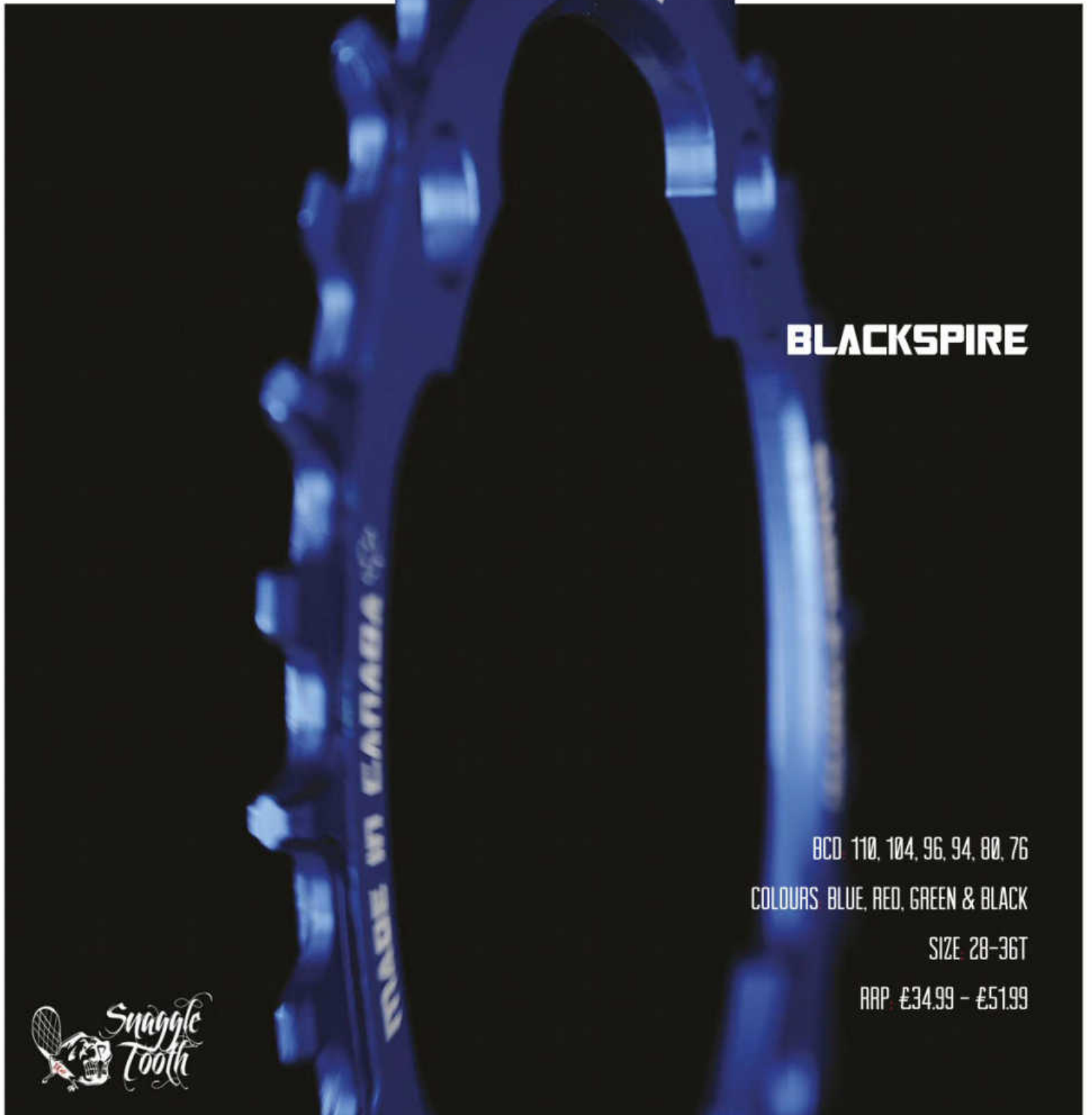
DH pads **£64.99**, enduro pads **£39.99**
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Greg Minnaar, we salute you and are excited to be working with you again this season. The title race is on!

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MBUK

#58 Trek Stache 9 29+



WHY IS THIS A SUPER BIKE?

- Trek's sliding Stranglehold dropouts offer 15mm of chainstay length adjustment (405-420mm) and can accommodate 650b+, 29in and 29+ wheels
- Boost technology helps to create stiffer wheels and allows more clearance for wider tyres
- Wide rims, wide tyres and big 29in hoops mean the Stache can tackle just about anything in its path

'Bigger is better'

Could Trek's Stache be the plus-size playbike we've been waiting for?

Just when we thought we were getting on top of all the wheel sizes the industry has thrown at us, along come 'plus-size' bikes and myriad new dimensions to get our heads around. While we're seeing most manufacturers settle on the more conservative 650b+ standard (2.8-3in tyres on wide 650b rims), some like to push things that little bit further.

Trek are one such company, and they've thrown their considerable weight behind the larger 29+ format (3in tyres on wide 29in rims) with the new Stache hardtail. Why opt

for the bigger of the two 'plus' sizes? "More rollover, momentum and traction, equalling a confidence inspiring, super-capable ride," says Chris Drewes, Trek's MTB Hardtail Product Manager. "Twenty-nine plus delivers a more pronounced benefit, especially for hardtails. The same gains going from 26in to 29in wheels are realised in going from 650+ to 29+."

Squeezing it in

Packaging big wheels in a frame that maintains the lively feel everyone yearns

for isn't easy, so how do you fit even bigger wheels in place without waving bye-bye to decent handling? As you can see, the Stache sports an elevated driveside chainstay. Though this means saying *adiós* to the front mech, this design – combined with the new SRAM-backed Boost hub standard (15x110mm front, 12x148mm) – has enabled Trek to keep the back end of the bike short even with a 3in tyre in place and maintain a lively feeling on the trail.

It took Trek numerous attempts to create an elevated stay that offered the right >>

ELEVATED STAY

By making the frame single-ring only and lifting the driveside chainstay, Trek have managed to comfortably fit a 29in wheel and 3in tyre into the rear end while maintaining a fun and playful ride feel.

SLACK ANGLES

With a 110mm (4.3in) travel fork in place, the Stache has a claimed head angle of 68.5 degrees and a BB height of 328mm, which isn't bad considering the whopping hoops fitted in place.

BOOST HUBS

SRAM's Boost standard uses wider spacing at the front (15x110mm) and rear (12x148mm) of the bike. This means wider hub flanges, better spoke bracing angles and overall stiffer wheels, plus more tyre clearance too. The small change in chain line can be corrected with a 3mm offset chainring.

BB FORGING

It's not just the elevated chainstay that allows the big wheel and tyre combo to work. The one-piece forging of the bottom bracket and part of the non-driveside chainstay, along with a carved-out notch on the underside of the BB, means there's enough room for the 3in rubber and some mud.

TYRES AND RIMS

Most brands seem to agree that the sweet spot for plus-size tyres is between 2.8 and 3in. Trek's in-house parts brand Bontrager created the Chupacabra, which measures in at 3in. On the Stache, this is paired with SUNRingle's Mulefut rim, with a 45mm internal width.

ONE-BY-SPECIFIC

When SRAM launched their 1x11 XX1 transmission a few years back it provided a wide enough gear range that there was no need for a second or even third chainring. This meant designers were no longer restricted by having to find room for a front mech and could experiment with frame shapes.

combination of stiffness and clearance. But that wasn't the end of it. We all know that trails rarely stay bone dry, especially here in the UK, so decent mud clearance was essential too. Drewes says: "Look at the non-driveside chainstay and you'll see that we have a one-piece forging of the bottom bracket and part of the chainstay. This allows us to maintain stiffness and proper clearances. Look even closer at the underside of the bottom bracket and you'll see a carved-out notch to optimise clearance for mud and tyre."

Then there are the 'Stranglehold' sliding dropouts at the rear. These allow you to run the Stache with a slammed 405mm chainstay length, but only if you're running a 27.5x3in or 29x2.35in rear tyre (this does mean you'll need to use a longer travel fork up front to maintain similar geometry though). Chris claims this setting "yields a very playful ride, which finds the rider lofting over obstacles and popping off jumps". Lengthen things to the 410mm mark and you're entering 29x3in tyre territory. Slide the Strangleholds all the way out to their final 420mm setting and, although the chainstays are still extremely stumpy for a big-wheeled bike, you're in for a more stable ride.

Suited and booted

Tyre and rim choice on plus-size bikes is critical and can make or break the ride. Trek have kitted the Stache 9 out with SUNRingle's Mulefut 50SL rims, which boast a 45mm internal width, and meaty Bontrager Chupacabra 3in tyres front and rear. Drewes explains: "We spent a lot of time riding rims with internal widths of 30mm all the way up to 46mm. We tested six to seven different rims and four different tyres (which is all that was available). We found that the optimal width for a 3in tyre, balancing rim weight and tyre support, was between 39 and 46mm internal".

Chris continues: "With a larger contact patch, the tyre tends to want to twist during harder cornering or over large bumps. Instead of overbuilding the tyre sidewalls you can add a few millimetres of rim width and have a significantly better overall system."

Don't believe the hype?

While some people may have negative preconceptions of plus-size bikes, those who've tried the Stache in anger have been suitably impressed. Tom Marvin, technical editor on our sister mag *What Mountain Bike*, says: "It's a bike that, despite some flaws, is really difficult to dislike – far more fun than it should be." 🍌

THE ESSENTIALS

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SEPT 2015
ISSUE 121

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FIRST UPLIFT**
Make more of your day
on the downhill

**5 ISSUES
FOR £5!**

A full-page photograph of a man, Joe Flanagan, climbing a dark, craggy rock face. He is wearing a green helmet and a green shirt, and a mountain bike is strapped to his back. A white rope is visible, extending from the top of the rock face down towards the bottom left. The background shows a vast, green valley with rolling hills and a winding river, under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

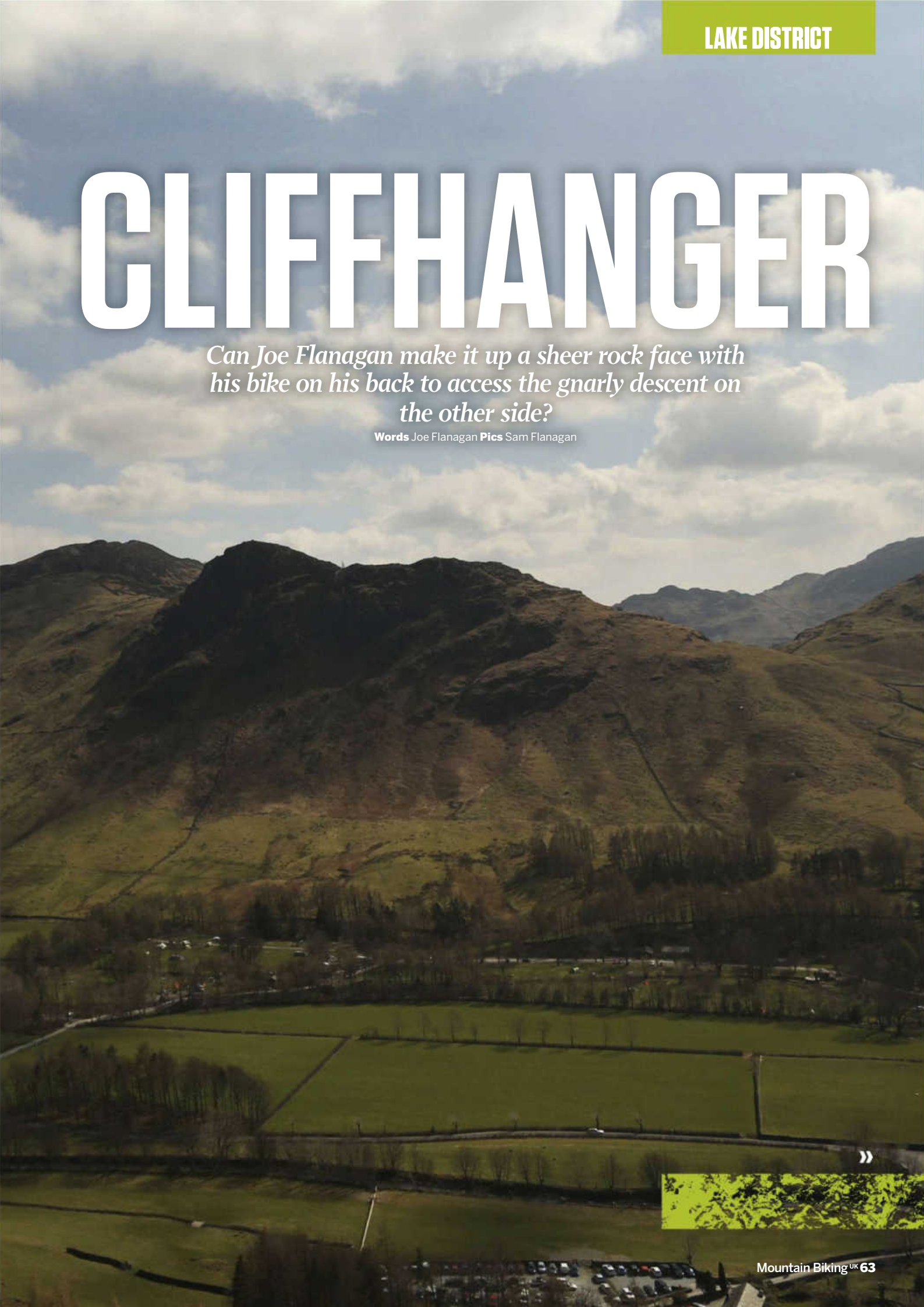
WHO IS JOE FLANAGAN? **THRILL-SEEKING YORKSHIREMAN**

Hailing from the small village of Ingleton in North Yorkshire, Joe Flanagan has had a lifelong passion for all things outdoors, from mountain biking to climbing and caving. After a decade racing downhill he now follows the Enduro World Series circus around the globe, but it's always been a difficult choice between SPDs and climbing boots. Never found without a smile on his face, even when soloing an exposed cliff face with his bike on his back, Joe's enthusiasm is infectious and he sees challenges as small steps rather than unconquerable obstacles. The question is, what next?

CLIFFHANGER

Can Joe Flanagan make it up a sheer rock face with his bike on his back to access the gnarly descent on the other side?

Words Joe Flanagan **Pics** Sam Flanagan



»





undreds of feet up, climbing an ever-steepening Lake District rock face solo, with no safety ropes and my 30lb (13.6kg) Santa Cruz Nomad strapped to my pack, I'm starting to think that this was one of those ideas that would have been best remaining just an idea. Falling is not an option. Pushing these thoughts to the back of my head, I ignore my sweaty palms, reach for the next polished limestone pocket that'll help keep me connected to this 200m-high monster and concentrate on staying in one piece.

Brothers in arms

This hairbrained scheme to combine two of my favourite hobbies – mountain biking and rock climbing – began life last winter, when I mentioned the idea to my older brother Sam during one of our regular evening sieges of Ingleborough. He said that climbing a vertical slab of rock with a mountain bike dangling from a pack designed to carry inner tubes and energy products was one of the most ridiculous ideas he'd heard in his short 25 years.

Sam's trouble was that he was approaching the idea from the stance of a non-climber – someone uncomfortable with height and exposure of more than a few feet, and ingrained childhood memories of being cemented against cliffs, unable to move his limbs due to fear. With the

debate galloping into its second hour we agreed to disagree and the plans lay dormant till spring rolled around, new adventures were calling and bucket list items needed ticking off.

Fast-forward a few months and as we drive through Ambleside towards the rapidly steeping Langdale Valley, miles ticking down, it's becoming ever more apparent what I've signed up for. Doubt is permeating my mind. Am I out of my depth? Will the gabble of E2s ['extremely severe' graded climbs] I completed last summer be any help to me on this wild – some might say reckless – undertaking? The usually welcoming climber's bar at The Old Dungeon Ghyll Hotel brings only more angst, because from here the carry to the base of Raven Crag and the scale of the task ahead is all too clear.

Mission impossible

A popular rock climbing spot, Raven Crag plays host to over 120 routes and attracts thousands of climbers a year. The views of Great Gable and Scafell Pike are breathtaking. It's not until you venture deep into the bowels of the Lakes that you begin to realise the severity of the landscape, with the deep glacial valleys fringed by towering peaks providing the perfect playground for climbing and riding alike.

My plan is to head up one of the main buttresses on the Crag, bike strapped on safe and sound, continue climbing up onto the Pike Of Stickle (one of the three fells that make up the Langdale Pikes), rebuild the bike and then »

I IGNORE MY SWEATY PALMS,
REACH FOR THE NEXT
POLISHED LIMESTONE POCKET
AND CONCENTRATE ON
STAYING IN ONE PIECE



Kind of puts that tough climb on your local loop into perspective, huh?



The main thing spurring Joe on was knowledge of just how good the descent to come was



TOOLS FOR THE JOB HOW TO ROCK CLIMB WITH A BIKE

It goes without saying that you shouldn't even think about attempting anything like this unless you're an experienced and confident climber. But if you are and fancy taking your bike with you, the kit is pretty simple really – all you need, apart from your climbing shoes and chalk bag, is a backpack, rope, knife and a Scout badge in knot craft, so get swotting up on those figure-of-eights and bowlines!

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descend the seriously steep Stake Pass, all in time for last orders. I knew it was ambitious, but now I was wondering if it was just plain foolhardy.

In the bar, I warned that “Shaun of the Dead had a comparably foolproof plan for his assault on The Winchester and look how that turned out”, I begin to work out the jigsaw puzzle that is strapping a 160mm travel, 650b wheeled enduro bike to a riding pack and mull over whether it was such a good idea to argue with Sam when he called my idea “ridiculous” on that cold December evening, which now seems so long ago.

Into the steep

The next morning I stare up at my cliff shaped nemesis. A few hundred hand and footholds and some uncomfortable exposure lie ahead before I can crack open the imaginary Champagne and shred my way down into the valley to safety. The weather is on my side, thankfully, and the sun beats down as I haul my precious but ill-shaped cargo onto the start of the first pitch. My main difficulty on the climb is going to be with tight spaces that are unaccommodating to the Super Tacky treads strapped to my back, and

A SPOT OF NERVOUS WRIGGLING AND WRITHING LATER AND I'M ON THE OTHER SIDE AND HEADING INTO THE STEEP

the first of these nooks is a couple of feet ahead. A spot of nervous wriggling, writhing and some slightly unconventional climbing techniques later and I'm on the other side and officially heading into the steep.

A misspent youth ensures that I begin ticking off pitches like there's no tomorrow. As I gain height I also gain people's interest – short breaks enable me to spot groups of now ant-like walkers down in the valley bottom, pointing with their poles to the madman up on the cliff face. Calls from fellow climbers of ‘You're keen, aren't you?’ and ‘Shouldn't you be riding up there?’ become commonplace, but with the Pike of Stickle on my mind these wisecracks are soon a distant memory. Towering over the Great Langdale valley at a height of 709m (2,326ft) the Pike gains its height fast. Beginning my now well-practised clamber towards the peak, I'm almost unaware of the bike strapped to my back – I could get used to this.

My mind is racing as I haul up another knife-edge ridge. One slip could end in quite a mess but that doesn't matter – my confidence is up and the sun is out. I'm rapidly nearing the summit and soon I'll be riding my bike down a hellish downhill, after spending the morning on the crag. Life as a cross-discipline action sport junkie couldn't be better!

I used to just think of the mountain bike as a vessel for downhill speed, but it's now aiding wild adventure and ensuring unforgettable memories.



With a cold pint waiting at the bottom of the hill, there was no stopping Joe!

BRENDAN FAIRCLOUGH



NO SHORTCUTS

It's not just what you see the moment you need to be at your best, it's that you were passionate enough to spend years of moments chewing up dirt to get there.

No peak is too high, no challenge too steep and, best of all, I no longer have to choose between bike and chalk bag – both are welcome!

With quizzical looks from disbelieving walkers acknowledged, knots reversed, bike reassembled and rope strapped on to my abused backpack, the technical switchbacks of Stake Pass are calling. As I refamiliarise myself with riding a bike and not hauling it up a cliff, it all begins to make perfect sense. Climbing and riding combine to give the perfect adventure, not to mention ideal cross training. Flitting from the calculated risk of clambering up a cliff face to the feeling of hurtling, on the edge of control, downhill on a mountain bike, it's easy to see the appeal of both sports and why they attract like-minded crowds of thrill-seekers.

As the downhill sections seamlessly link a grin plastered itself across my face. Blasting down the rough, rocky terrain in the warm spring air, with the promise of liquid refreshment at the now highly appealing climber's bar, I couldn't be happier. My climb-and-ride mission has been a

success. Not only have I supplemented the buzz of the downs with that extra rush of adrenaline that only carrying your bike up an exposed 2,000ft peak can provide but, more importantly, Sam was wrong – the idea worked a treat and our sibling rivalry is well and truly settled. Until the next bickering session, that is. ☺

WITH QUIZZICAL LOOKS FROM DISBELIEVING WALKERS ACKNOWLEDGED, THE SWITCHBACKS ARE CALLING



CLIMBING ROCKS! AND CAN BENEFIT YOUR BIKING

Climbing and MTBing have more in common than you'd first think – they're just different approaches to hunting those highs. Both expose the participant to risk, the former slightly more calculated, valuing knowledge and experience over balls and finesse. Rock climbing develops your upper body, hand and arm strength, which is invaluable to mountain bikers – being able to hold on through the gnarliest rock gardens in the middle of 20-minute-plus alpine descents is a huge advantage. Whether you're soloing a multi-pitch monster or never higher than a metre off the floor at your local bouldering wall, don't overlook the benefits of a few rainy winter evenings tearing your fingers to bits!



Want to conquer those extended rocky descents? Joe reckons climbing could help







BUILDING THE BEAST

UK slopestyle star Sam Reynolds heads to South Africa to construct the mother of all dirt jumps

Words Sam Reynolds **Pics** Eric Palmer

Hitting bigger and bigger jumps is just what us boys like to do (and no doubt a few rad girls out there too). It's a natural thing to do if you enjoy progressing and improving your skills. Even as a 10-year-old I'd build jumps at my grandad's house with my bro, making the wooden kicker bigger and bigger, and only stopping when we ran out of wood. And now here I am 13 years later, still doing it.

The jumps I want to jump now are a little bigger though. In fact, so big they don't actually exist. But doing crazy things on my bike is my absolute passion, so I decided to take matters into my own »

With a 22ft lip and 500ft run-up, this step-up is definitely not for the nervous!



You should see these guys' sandcastle skills down the beach



hands and build the tallest dirt jump step-up of all time. To dream big, first of all I'd need a dream team, and no one dreams bigger than Canadian pro rider Matt MacDuff, my right-hand man for the project. Danny Pace, Blake Samson and Dylan Stone rounded off the riding crew, and Tom Grundy, Jules Langeard and Sam Davies came along to document the whole thing in the form of the *Pure Darkness 2* web edit.

Need a nutter

Second, I'd need the perfect dirt, a huge hill and a nutter crazy enough to allow such a thing to be built on their land, and for that I knew we'd have to travel outside of the UK. Quite far outside, as it turned out, because the final choice was the Garden Route Trail Park in Knysna, South Africa. This amazing bike park is owned, run and created by farmer Rob Dormehl, a real character, who was instantly on board and probably the main driving force behind the 'yeah,

keep making it taller' calls. Rob and his men had already built a 35ft roll-in tower at the top of a huge hill so there wasn't really any doubt about it – this thing was going to be a beast!

Off the scale

Now, there is some sort of science, if you wish to call it that, behind dirt jump building. I know through experience that a 25ft tall roll-in will usually give you around a 25ft gap jump with a steep standard 8/9ft lip. This is on flat ground and it's a fairly stock first jump set-up at contests.

I also know that the next jump will be roughly the same size, just slightly bigger if it's down a hill or slightly smaller if not. If the take-off is mellow you'll go further. If it's steeper you'll go higher but less far. So, there are a lot of variables to consider when building »



Shovels are compulsory, fetching headgear optional

HOW TO

BUILD YOUR OWN JUMPS

DO

- ⚙ Use the terrain. You can save a lot of time and energy by incorporating existing lumps and dips into your jumps, especially for the landings, which take the most dirt.
- ⚙ Check where you're building before making any jumps – people won't take kindly to a 6ft dirt jump in their garden or field! You should seek the landowner's permission before starting work.
- ⚙ If you know of a local jump spot then take a shovel, be friendly and ask them if they want help with their jumps and join in!

DON'T

- ⚙ Go to other people's jumps and dig or change them without asking the locals first. If the jumps are clearly abandoned it should be OK, but it's best to find out.
- ⚙ Go large straight away – build jumps you and your mates can enjoy, then progress from there. Half the fun is perfecting your jumps and making them smoother, steeper, taller or longer. I'm not saying you shouldn't send it, you definitely should – nothing is more fun than sending a big new jump for the first time!
- ⚙ Complain about not having any jumps near you. Jumps don't build themselves – make it happen!

Most cycling-specific eyewear looks like it was made for racing. The Adapt looks stylish, yet it works like high-tech sport glasses. Lenses are swapped in a second. Ventilation is top notch. I love 'em!

FOR THE FULL STORY, CHECK:
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I DON'T WANT TO LOOK LIKE AN ALIEN WHEN I'M RIPPING AROUND!

Joost Wichman

Former World Champion, fourcross



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jumps, but it's pretty simple. This so-called science is going to have to be demoted to theory for this jump though, because – with a 35ft start tower, 500ft-long downhill run-up and 22ft tall lip – your guess is as good as mine as to how far we might go! We could only speculate on the speed we'd gain from the massive run-up, and it was getting to the point where aerodynamic speed tucks would become a factor!

We did the best guessing we could and, after four days of building in the awesome but sweltering South African landscape, it was time for the moment of truth. As the guy behind the project I'd nominated myself as test pilot, and

sitting at the top of that massive roll-in gave me a feeling of excitement and pride that the boys and I had built such a legendary jump.

Shoot for the moon

I rolled in at full speed with the wind howling past my ears, hit the lip and went straight to the moon. I'm not sure what happened, but my brain couldn't accept the height or the airtime so I bailed for no good reason and came crashing down on my feet, cartwheeling and tumbling down the landing.

We were all stoked because from then on we knew it was perfect – we just had to hold on! On the second run I nailed it and the session began, with everyone throwing down huge.

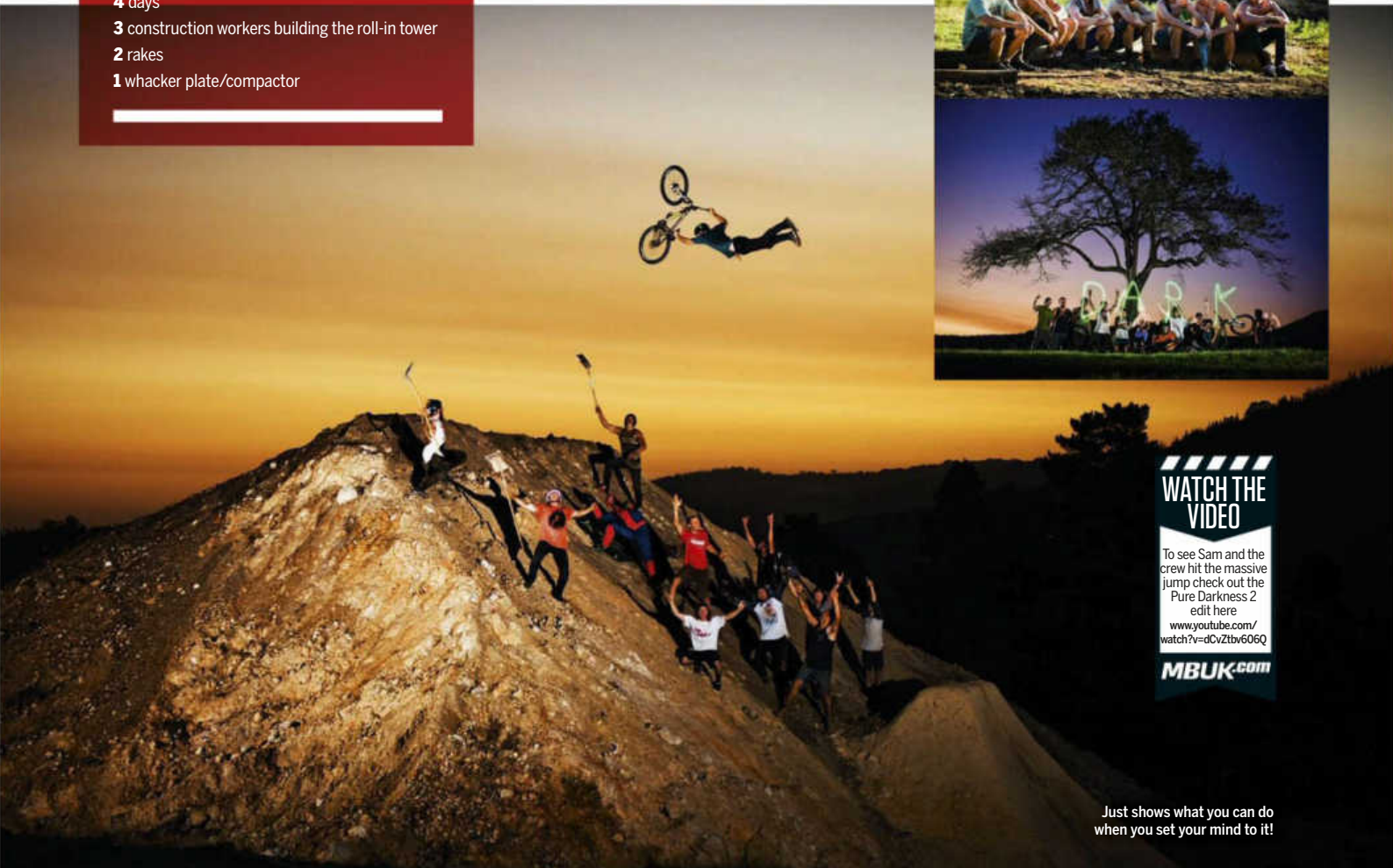
To have found the right spot, built the jump and enjoyed it with my mates was just the most rewarding thing and made this a real trip of a lifetime. We went to the extreme here, but all you need to have fun is a few shovels and a few mates. The most fun is hanging out, building something and improving it.

I hope this feature can inspire even one person to get out there, have a go and have a good time! ⚙️

TOOLS FOR THE JOB

TO BUILD THIS JUMP WE HAD:

- 400 gallon water bowser
- 40 ton JCB and driver who worked for 96 hours
- 8 shovels
- 5 riders
- 3 filmmakers
- 4 farmworkers
- 4 days
- 3 construction workers building the roll-in tower
- 2 rakes
- 1 whacker plate/compactor



WATCH THE VIDEO

To see Sam and the crew hit the massive jump check out the Pure Darkness 2 edit here
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCvZtbv606Q

MBUK.com

Just shows what you can do when you set your mind to it!

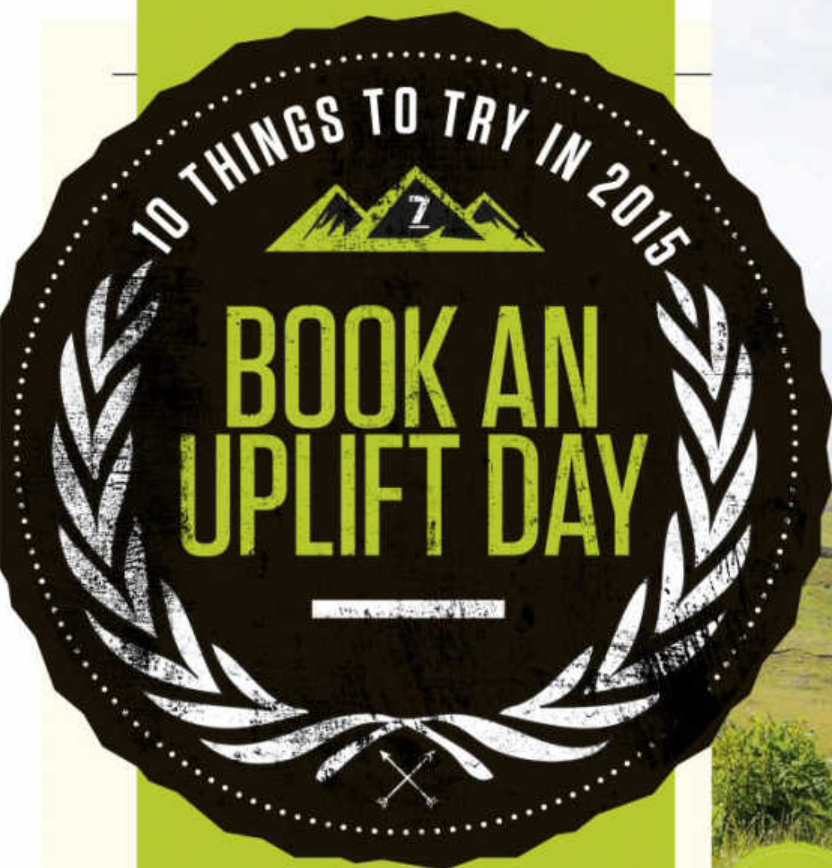


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Everything you need to know to enjoy a day of gravity-fed fun



WHAT IS AN UPLIFT?

BIKE PREP

Booking your place on an uplift doesn't guarantee a day of hassle-free riding – bear in mind that your bike is going to be put through a full day's worth of hell. Here's what to check...

Cockpit

Check your stem bolts are properly done up, ideally using a torque wrench – you don't want your stem and front wheel to end up facing in different directions or your handlebar to pitch forward. Get any play in your headset checked out.

Brakes

Check how much meat is left on your pads. Your brakes are going to spend an entire day going through max heat cycles so 'that'll be fine' isn't an option. Make sure all your rotor bolts are present, correct and properly torqued too.

Gears

Pedalling as hard as you can on a bike that's already going very fast is a great feeling. Getting thrown out the front door as your chain derails isn't. Make sure your mech clips through the cogs like a pro. See how in Grimetime on page 140.



DIAL YOUR RIDE

If you're lucky enough to have a nice new bike, there are few better opportunities to set it up than on an uplift day.

Here are the keys to finding those perfect settings:

■ Make a note of the air pressures and dial positions on your fork and shock before you start the day's riding. After each run, make a quick feedback note then dial in two clicks at a time on each unit and record the changes. Break the track into sections in your head (roots, steep, fast/smooth) and think about where your bike feels best.

■ The same can be done with your tyre pressures too. It's worth investing in a cheap digital pressure gauge for this.

■ It's important to only change one thing at a time during this process, otherwise you can't be certain which changes are affecting what.



GO FASTER



Uplift days are a fantastic place to really work on your riding. Of course, you can turn up and just ride a variety of tracks as the notion takes you, but putting in a bit more thought can pay dividends. Focus on one track and work on each element of technique— experiment with braking points, pedal inputs and different lines. It'll amaze you how much faster you'll be riding by the end of the day. A helmet cam can really help with this process too.

UNSPOKEN RULES

Uplifts may be a gravity-assisted free-for-all but there are some rules that can make things easier for everyone

Talk to your driver

He's in charge. If you want to stay up the track and work on a section this run, tell him. He then knows that keeping a busload of sweaty, impatient riders waiting on the next run isn't necessary. And, of lesser concern, that you aren't wrapped around a tree.

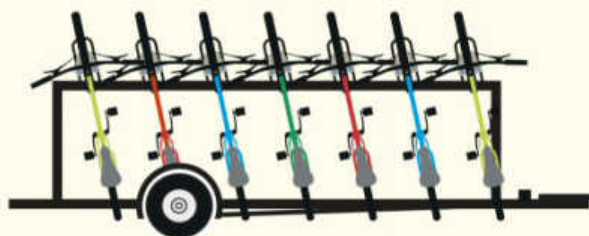
Get there early

If runs start at 9am, get there for 8.30. This will give you time to get ready and set your bike up. Rushing to get on the trailer can result in damage to bikes and flesh and, worse still, a run off your day's total.

Bring food

Stashing water and some Haribo in the uplift van can help keep you operating properly throughout the day. Packing some sarnies saves you scouring the back end of nowhere looking for lunch.

Never say 'just one more run'
Just don't, OK!



THE ESSENTIALS

Bring a few basics to make your bike and your day run smoother



Allen/Torx keys

Do we really need to explain why these may be of benefit?



Spare tube

Even if you run a tubeless set-up, blowing your tyre off the rim is easily remedied with an inner tube. Bring a pump and levers too.



Protection

A helmet (ideally full-face), gloves and body armour are all recommended. Check if your uplift provider requires anything else.



Paper towels

Handy for goggle cleaning, bike cleaning and, well, the type of cleaning that ensues when you visit a poorly equipped portable loo...

NEXT ISSUE

Go for a night ride
ON SALE
18 SEPT

WELL-THOUGHT OUT SUPERIORITY



THE ALL-NEW FOCUS SAM

FOCUS SAM – the secret weapon of the Focus Trail Team in the fight for victory and those vital seconds. That's why we have given the tried-and-tested, aggressively modern geometry of the 27.5" aluminium FOCUS SAM shorter chain stays for even livelier handling. Combined with impressive agility uphill, a hungry 160 mm chassis and consistently smooth running downhill, the high-end Enduro is an excellent companion on the most remote trails in the world. With a racy design, a low weight of just 12.5 kg in the top version and the high self-damping capacity of the carbon structure, the bike comes out on top in the Enduro sector!

www.focus-bikes.com // facebook/focus.bikes

FOCUS

ALIVE AND KICKING

We're wowed by the action at Munich's Swatch Prime Line and find slopestyle has far from had its day

Words and pics Simon Nieborak



B

ack in the mid 2000s, the huge success of Whistler's Crankworx slopestyle comp looked set to usher in a new era of snappy hardtails, crowd-pleasing tricks and podium Champagne spraying. But the discipline never quite took off in the UK, where racing reigned supreme, and it was the wilder 'big mountain' freeride events like Red Bull Rampage that grabbed riders' imagination. That doesn't mean slopestyle's had its day though – in fact it's thriving, if the Swatch Prime Line, headline event at the Munich Mash action sports festival at the end of June, is anything to go by.

Concrete jungle

Packed with big senders and epic tricks, this comp held in the centre of Munich is the only urban event to have earned FMB World Tour diamond status. This year's round improved on the previous incarnation with a total of nine massive features, including a giant first drop, some huge dirt jumps nearly four storeys high and a spine on top of a bridge. The contest was graced by loads of top names, including the UK's Sam Pilgrim and Sam Reynolds, Canada's Brett Rheeder and Anthony Messere, and the USA's Greg Watts and Nicholi

Rogatkin. Californian BMX legend Ryan Nyquist, who's been dabbling with big wheels (well, 26in – for the moment!), also made an appearance.

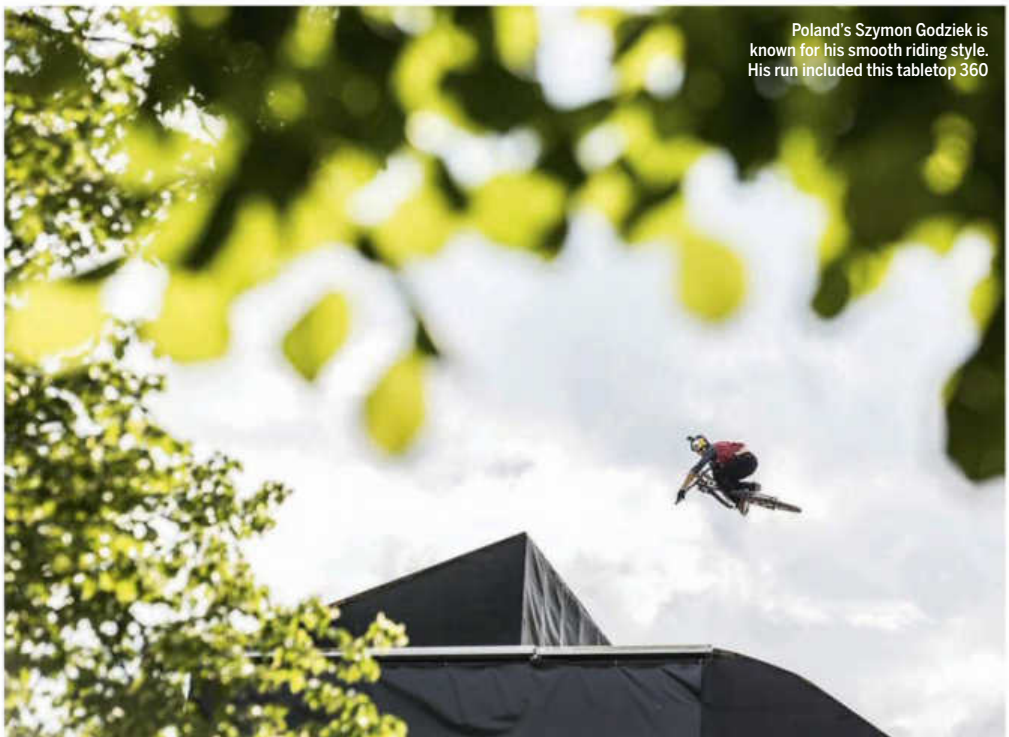
The dramatic backdrop of the urban skyline set off the softer shapes of the transplanted dirt that made up the take-offs and landings. Practice was sunny and went off without a hitch, but heavy grey skies loomed over the Olympic park ahead of the main event, mirroring the concrete jungle that expanded around the bustling site. Luckily for the riders the rain held off, though the giant jumps put them at the mercy of sudden gusts of wind.

German rider Amir Kabbani went for a 360 off an enormous drop but was blown severely off course and had a brutal crash, breaking several ribs. His wipe-out wasn't the only spectacle – one gentleman decided to jiggle his meat and two veg around for all to see, though it turned out that wasn't such a crowd-pleaser as a 360 backflip!

Despite what the armchair jury of internet MTB experts says, it's clear slopestyle still has the potential to attract enormous crowds and gnarly riders who are ready to send every house-sized jump for death or glory. There's lots of talk about 'taking mountain biking back to the mountains' but city centre events where the beer flows, the transport works and the crowds are massive have a lot going for them – if Mohammed won't go to the mountain, bring the mountain to Mohammed! ⚙



The course includes some massive dirt jumps, nearly four storeys high



Poland's Szymon Godziek is known for his smooth riding style. His run included this tabletop 360

Masters of Munich Results

Canadian slopestyle superstar Brett Rheeder took the overall win, as well as the Best Trick prize for an amazing backflip tailwhip, cementing him in first place in the FMB World Tour rankings. Thomas Genon from Belgium finished in second place and America's Nicholi Rogatkin rounded off the podium in third. Britain's Sam Pilgrim came a solid fifth behind the Czech Republic's Tomas Zejda.



Carson Storch pulling a corkflip – the American looks set to stir up the freestyle scene



Brett Rheeder stomping a huge frontflip on the last jump, securing his win



Who'd 've thunk it? A streaker at a dirt comp....



It took over a week to build the slopestyle course in Munich's Olympic park



A bevy of Bavarian beauties...



The guys celebrate their podium places in time-honoured fashion

WELCOME TO THE WORLDS

YOUR ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO THE 2016
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

Vallnord Bike Park,
La Massana, Andorra
1-6 September 2015



The World Championships is a one-off 'bin it or win it' race that often provides some of the biggest highs and lows of the racing season. Traditionally held towards the end of the year's race calendar, the World Champs incorporates cross-country, trials and downhill disciplines. And rather than riders racing for their sponsored teams as they do throughout the World Cup season, at the Champs they represent their home nation.

THE VENUE



Andorra, situated between France and Spain in the heart of the Pyrenees, is famous for its luxury ski resorts, lack of VAT, beautiful scenery, relaxing culture and shopping. In the summer though, the chic town of La Massana is overrun with unruly bikers ready to tear up the mountainside at the Vallnord Bike Park – this year more so than usual when the World Champs kick off, running from 1-6 September. The week-long event sees the cross-country riders do battle on Saturday 6 September and culminates with the downhill finals on Sunday 7. And the Masters World Champs are being held at the same venue the week before.

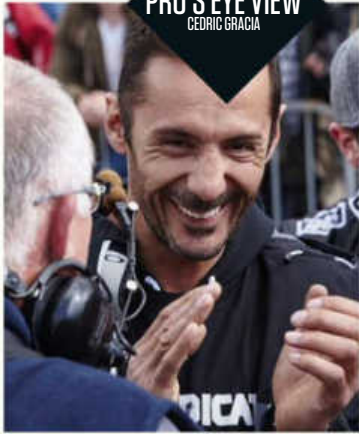
THE RIDERS



The last time a World Cup was held in Andorra in 2013, Rémi Thirion won by 1.35 seconds over Gee Atherton with Sam Hill in third. Thirion would have been one to watch at this year's Worlds but an ankle injury sustained at the Mont-St-Anne World Cup means he'll be lucky to race at all. So which Brits are likely to fare well in Andorra?

- **Josh Bryceland** came second at the last Worlds and is on top form.
- **Danny Hart** has the biggest winning margin at a Worlds.
- **Gee Atherton** is the reigning world champion.
- **Rachel Atherton** is a hot ticket on the gnarly track in Andorra.
- **Manon Carpenter** won last year, so is keen to defend her title.
- **Tahnee Seagrave** is a fresh threat at the top level of downhill racing.

PRO'S EYE VIEW
CEDRIC GRACIA



Cedric Gracia, long-time Andorra resident, says he's really excited about the World Champs: "We've worked hard on the bike park and on the trails. We have a successful bike park and the hope is this event will highlight Andorra as one of the best bike parks in Europe. The World Champs track is definitely my favourite in the whole bike park. To win the race, riders will need to be consistently fast along the whole track."

PREVIOUS WINNERS

MEN:

- 2004** Fabien Barel
- 2005** Fabien Barel
- 2006** Sam Hill
- 2007** Sam Hill
- 2008** Gee Atherton
- 2009** Steve Peat
- 2010** Sam Hill
- 2011** Danny Hart
- 2012** Greg Minnaar
- 2013** Greg Minnaar
- 2014** Gee Atherton

WOMEN:

- 2004** Vanessa Quin
- 2005** Anne-Caroline Chausson
- 2006** Sabrina Jonnier
- 2007** Sabrina Jonnier
- 2008** Rachel Atherton
- 2009** Emmeline Ragot
- 2010** Tracy Moseley
- 2011** Emmeline Ragot
- 2012** Morgane Charre
- 2013** Rachel Atherton
- 2014** Manon Carpenter

THE TRACK

- ◆ 2.5km in length
- ◆ 700m altitude loss
- ◆ Approx 4mins to ride
- ◆ Physical and technical top section
- ◆ New jumps through the middle section



THE BIKE PARK



Vallnord Bike Park officially opened in 2005 and boasts 40km of downhill tracks, with up to 1,000m of altitude loss in one descent. The highest point of the bike park is an impressive 2,350m – nigh on half the height of Mont Blanc in France, Europe's highest mountain. The bike park has 23 tracks. Two are cross-country routes, one is for enduro and the rest are downhill runs. You can ride the 2.5km World Champs track when the pros aren't racing on it!



WORLD CUP FACTS

Spectator Tips

- The race is free to watch, so head up the mountain with all the necessary provisions (beer!) and get cheering for your favourite rider.
- Gondola prices are €5 for one day, €7 for one day and a sandwich and €10 for three days.
- There's public and private parking in La Massana, a short walk from the gondola station.



- ◆ It's a standalone event and everything rides on one run so the riders go hell for leather.
- ◆ The current world champions are Gee Atherton and Manon Carpenter, both from the UK.
- ◆ Once you've won the coveted rainbow stripes, you can display them on your race jersey forever.
- ◆ Danny Hart has the biggest ever winning margin at the World Champs – 11.69 seconds in the grottiest conditions.
- ◆ Nico Vouilloz has won seven gold medals at the World Champs, the most out of any rider, tied with Anne-Caroline Chausson.

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Rider: Jesse Melamed | Photo: Margus Riga | Location: Sedona, Arizona

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product, regardless
of the price tag



BELOW AVERAGE:
Flawed in some way



POOR: Simply put,
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Rob Weaver

With two decades of riding and racing experience, Rob knows what works and what doesn't



Guy Kesteven

Our ultra-experienced northern test engine is the ultimate exposer of kit that doesn't measure up



Alex Evans

Our new Staff Writer is back in the UK after seven years in the Alps and has a reputation for wrecking bikes



Seb Stott

Seb's passion for engineering helps him pick products apart, and he's no slouch on the race track either



James Blackwell

Short and fast, pinned or binned, Art Editor Jimmer has been testing kit longer than he'll happily admit to



Jake Ireland

Jake spends every day riding, and his injury list proves he's pushing the limits to provide the very best testing



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HT ME05 pedals

£119.99 Ison Distribution www.ison-distribution.com

IF YOU'RE A bit of a weight weenie and have a penchant for flat pedals, HT's ME05s could be just what you're looking for. Though the name doesn't exactly stand out, the minimal 292g heft does. But it's not just the lack of grams that we're into here.

The platform will happily accommodate the biggest feet out there, while the 10 pins per side help keep your feet planted in pretty much all situations. We like the way the pins screw in

from the reverse side of the platform too, and although the grip on offer is impressive, they aren't so claw-like that you can't adjust your stance on the pedal. The deeply concave platform – we're talking a good few millimetres' drop from the 16mm deep outer edges to the centre of the pedal – cups your foot securely, boosting grip and giving you that surefooted feel, even when the trail gets rowdy.

The lightweight magnesium body has shrugged off multiple

scrapes, bangs and blunt hits during testing with little fuss and no significant damage, just superficial scuffs and scratches. The dual bushings and sealed bearing inside each pedal are still spinning smoothly too, even after months of use in grotty weather. **ROB**

MBUK
Well shaped, offer impressive grip and have stood up to a proper beating in typically British weather



Endura MT500 Print long-sleeve jersey

£34.99 Endura www.endura.co.uk

THE MT500 JERSEY is light and airy, making it a welcome addition to our summer kit drawer. Thanks to the lightweight, almost silky-to-the-touch fabric, it's extremely comfortable and, because it's nice and thin, it doesn't get particularly sweaty even on clammier days. If you do get a bit sticky, it wicks sweat relatively well too. Sizing comes up a touch on the large side though. Our medium sample was huge and would have easily been a large on many other brands' sizing charts so we'd recommend dropping a size if you're tempted to buy one. **ROB**





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Shimano XTR M9050 Di2 transmission

£1,760 Madison www.madison

SHIMANO'S NEW XTR Di2 is a step up from the electronically controlled transmissions that until now have been the preserve of our roadie cousins. Up-rated mech motors allow muddy shifts, while riders can choose to shift manually or select one of two user-defined 'SynchroShift' modes, where the front mech moves automatically to give race-car-like sequential shifting.

The shifters have a tactile feel, with a defined 'click' as you shift. You can adjust the lever reach, and the paddles are shaped and textured to prevent thumb slips. Some testers did struggle to find a comfortable position for the shifters next to their brake levers though. Needing only one shifter

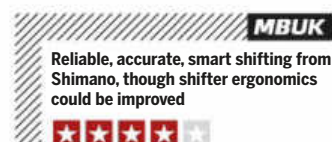
in SynchroShift mode is XTR Di2's winning ticket, clearing space for an under-bar dropper post lever and reducing cable faff. It does feel like Shimano have missed a trick though, attempting to mimic a mechanical feel when a smaller, less intrusive button approach could have worked.

Unlike SRAM's 11-speed cassettes, the 11-40t XTR block can be mounted to a standard freehub body. Jumps between gear ratios are kept below 15 per cent – ideal for racers who watch their cadence carefully – and shifting is ridiculously accurate, with no noise or misshifts during testing. In muddy conditions, the clutch-controlled mech powers through regardless, and without

gear cables, feel at the shifter remains neutral, though not as solid as with SRAM. Up front, the powerful mech motor means shifting remains accurate even under power. Our crank arms suffered shoe rub within just a couple of rides though.

The bar-mounted display is easy to read and shows your gear selection, battery life and SynchroShift mode. It sits next to the stem, but we'd like to be able to mount it over the stem for a cleaner look. Plug the system into a Windows PC and Shimano's simple to use E-Tube software lets you adjust the lever functions, shifting speed and SynchroShift ratios. You can also integrate it with Fox's iCTD

suspension control system. Don't be put off by all the electronics though, because XTR Di2 is incredibly intuitive to use. The shifter feel never changes, regardless of the conditions, giving a sense of infallible performance. There's little doubt that it represents the pinnacle of shifting performance, but until the technology trickles down, its price is eye-wateringly high. The system also makes a lot more sense on Di2 ready frames. **TOM**



PRODUCT NEWS



New Habit

With the departure of Peter Denk, the man behind the pull shock designs used on Cannondale's Jekyll and Trigger bikes, things have become a little more conventional for 2016. The new Habit has 120mm (4.7in) of travel front and rear (though the SE model has a 130mm fork) and is pitted to be a great all-rounder. There are eight models in the line-up, with prices starting at £1,300. There's also the Bad Habit, with bang-on-trend 650b+ wheel size. Check out www.cannondale.com for all the latest.



Fresh take

Everyone loves a classic, which is why many of us have a soft spot for Cotic's Solaris 29er. It's just been reworked and will now happily accept 650b+ wheels as well as regular 29in hoops should you wish to keep your tyres a little narrower. You can pick the new Solaris frame up for £499 and full bikes with a full Shimano XT set-up start at £2,350. For £150 extra you can get Cotic's custom 650b+ WTB wheel and tyre package. If you want to learn more, head over to www.cotic.co.uk.

Moto to mountain

The rumours were true – Swedish suspension company Öhlins have developed an air shock and it'll feature on Specialized's Enduro S-Works and Expert bikes for 2016. The single-tube STX22 damper weighs a claimed 380g and offers just six clicks of low-speed rebound damping adjustment, nine clicks of low-speed compression and three high-speed compression settings. It also features Specialized's Autosag technology, which makes set-up a doddle. Keep an eye on www.specialized.com.



Race Face Rip Strip bumbag

£39.95 **Silverfish** www.silverfish-uk.com

RACE FACE'S RIP Strip offers something a bit different for those determined to avoid wearing a pack. The width and height of the padded 'lumbar belt' make it instantly comfier than a regular bumbag, and the fact there's some give means it doesn't feel quite as restrictive either. You can cram all the essentials into the combination of mesh stash and zipped pockets too. We securely stowed a tiny high-volume pump in the central elasticated loop as well

as tyre levers, a multi-tool, spare tube, phone and keys. Though the zipped pockets are handy, it would be good to have a slightly larger pocket to accommodate bigger smartphones or waterproof phone cases. At a push you can wedge a small drinks bottle in the Rip Strip and it'll stay put on the trail, but it isn't the comfiest option, which is a pain if you can't fit a bottle cage on your bike. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★★



Topeak CO2-Bra CO₂ inflator

£21.99 **Extra UK** www.extrauk.co.uk

THE CO2-BRA MAY just look like a jazzed up CO₂ inflator with a snake-like head – which is extremely comfy to hold in use – but it has plenty of useful features built in. Presta valves simply push into the head, while Schrader valves screw into an internal thread. A small captive ring on the back of the unit can be placed around the head of the cartridge to stop accidentally discharge of CO₂ and there's a simple indicator on the back to let you know if the snake is armed and dangerous. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★★★

X-Tools Air Shock Air Can Removal Wrench

£10 **Hotlines** www.hotlines-uk.com

REMOVING THE AIR can from your shock may be necessary in order to service it or change the volume spacers. If it's too stiff to unscrew by hand, a strap wrench such as this cheap and cheerful example from X-Tools can help. The rubber strap is removable so you can wrap it around the shock without unbolting it from the bike – great for quick volume spacer swaps – and it's easily long enough to grip any size air can. We found it to provide ample torque to remove stubborn sleeves. It's a plastic tool but feels robust enough. A solid investment for the price. **SEB**

MBUK ★★★★★





Joystick Analog Carbon bar

£129.99 Hookit Products www.hookitproducts.co.uk

AT 800MM WIDE, this lightweight carbon bar is designed for the discerning DH or enduro rider. Available in 31.8 and 35mm clamp diameters, it has cut marks to help you tailor the width, dotted markings to make it easy to set up your controls symmetrically and a central skull and crossbones motif so you can centre the bar in your stem. Handy. Our 31.8mm bar weighed an impressive 236g but felt more than stiff enough

when hammering into catch berms or sprinting out of the saddle, while seeming to dampen trail buzz quite nicely too. With a nine-degree backsweep and six-degree upsweep, it's on the curvier side. We found the shape comfortable, but those who struggle to weight the front wheel or have an elbows-out riding style may prefer something straighter. **SEB**

MBUK ★★★★★

fi'zi:k M5B shoes

£149.99 Extra UK www.extrauk.co.uk

THE M5BS may be some of fi'zi:k's more affordable shoes but at just under £150 they still aren't exactly cheap. Still, they're handmade in Italy and designed to handle everything from trail riding to cyclo-cross racing or your daily commute.

The soft Microtex and anti-scratch leather upper helps make the M5B really comfortable. Things feel relatively roomy width wise but the Velcro strap and Boa closure do a grand job of clamping the shoe up securely without creating any pinch points or hot spots. On the trail, the carbon reinforced nylon sole is plenty stiff enough to transfer power efficiently when you're really cranking, with very little flex. They aren't too bad to walk in and the blocky tread isn't too slippery on damp rock either.

The sticking point for us is the limited cleat adjustment. For super-efficient, less technical mile munching, the forward cleat position is no bad thing, but the inability to move the cleat further towards the middle of the foot meant more aggressive riders just couldn't find a sweet spot, ultimately limiting the M5Bs' appeal. **ROB**

MBUK

Really comfortable, but limited cleat adjustment will put many less XC focused riders off

★★★★★



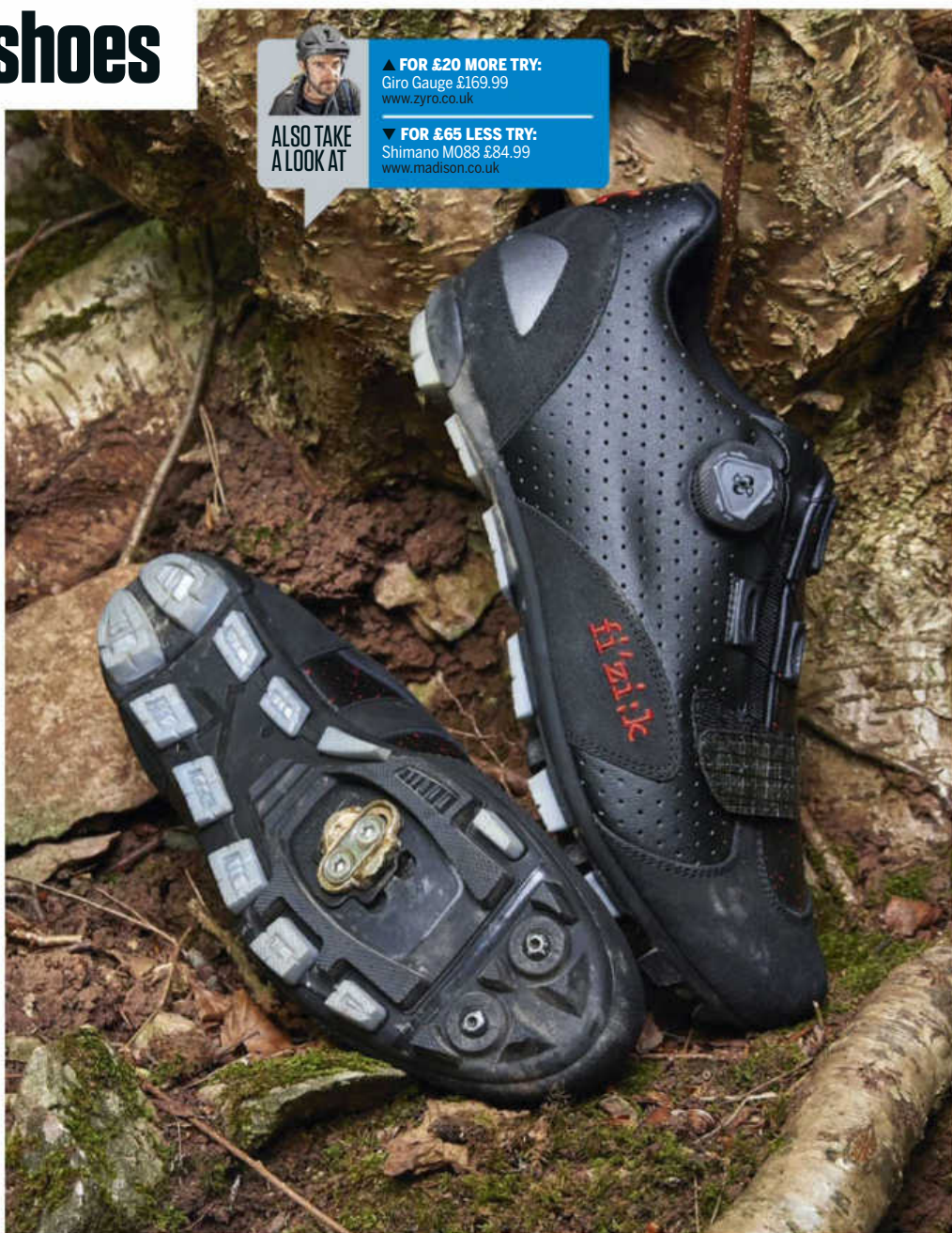
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www.madison.co.uk



MBUK WRECKED & RATED

Brand New Kit

PRODUCT NEWS

Continued



Hei now

The guys at Kona have been working tirelessly to reinvigorate their range and have made significant changes to some key models. The big focus for 2016 was the Hei Hei XC bike, which gets a new 'Fuse Independent Suspension' design. This single-pivot set-up uses 1.5 degrees of flex in the rear triangle (as opposed to a secondary pivot on the seatstay or chainstay) to provide 100mm (3.9in) of rear wheel travel. There are four Hei Heis in the new line-up and pricing starts at £2,099. Have a gander at www.konaworld.com to properly check them out.

Price pointing

The £1,000 mark is a very competitive place to be these days, especially with GT's announcement of their new Verb full-suspension bike. There are three Verbs to choose from, starting at £800 and topping out at £1,200. Trail orientated geometry is paired with 120mm (4.7in) of travel front and rear. The £1,000 offering comes with a Suntour fork and GT's own rear shock. Have a look at www.gtbicycles.com for more details.



Collectors' classics

If you're a bit of a sucker for mountain bike memorabilia, Shimano's new limited edition XTR pedals and matching M200 shoes, both in a striking blue colour, could well be for you. The Big S are celebrating 25 years of the SPD, which is why they're rolling these out to dealers. Should you wish to get them muddy, the pedals and shoes are both identical to the standard models, but very, very blue. Visit www.madison.co.uk for details of availability.



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A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £10 MORE TRY:**
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£90 www.specialized.com

▼ **FOR £15 LESS TRY:**
Scott Trail Lady £65
www.scott-sports.com



Five Ten Freerider Wms shoes

£80 **Five Ten** www.fiveten.com

WOMEN'S FLAT PEDAL shoes are rarer than diamonds, so the Freerider Wms are a welcome addition to the Five Ten line-up. They've redesigned this popular model to suit the – on average – smaller, narrower female foot. Sizing starts at UK 2.5, which is great news for those who've had to wear men's or kids' shoes.

On the trail, the Freerider Wms' narrower heel cup, lower ankle notch and internal cushioning holds the foot

securely, meaning less movement, less heel lift and less rubbing at the cuff. It's not the most form-fitting shoe we've tried though, and while great for most purposes, on long days this, combined with the flexible sole, led to tired feet.

As you'd expect from Five Ten, the Stealth Phantom outsole is as grippy as glue and the Freerider Wms stay secure on the pedals over the roughest terrain. The initial tackiness has

decreased slightly over time on our test samples and the tread isn't deep enough to get you up muddy slopes when off the bike.

The canvas and leather uppers are sturdy, allowing air through but also water. Happily they dry quickly. **AOIFE**

MBUK

A much better fit and size range for women with unbeatable grip, though not the stiffest shoes out there



Tifosi Pro Escalate SF Kit glasses

£129.99 **Zyro** www.zyro.co.uk

WE REGULARLY WEAR Tifosi's excellent conventional glasses, but the Pro Escalate SF Kit is a whole new concept. You get one set of arms plus a full-frame front and frameless wraparound shield with fixed smoke tint and photochromic lenses in both formats. This theoretically provides every optical combination you need, from road to rad and dazzle to drizzle.

The full frame creates some peripheral interference but it ventilates well and the photochromic lens is rapidly

responsive from almost clear to reasonably dark. Getting the arms onto the wraparound lens is harder, and the loose fit means it slides straight off faces that the full lens hugs securely. The photochromic lens has a much darker range too, restricting its UK versatility. Noticeable arm loosening during testing and the high package price make Tifosi's excellent separate glasses a much better bet. **GUY**

MBUK ★★★★★



BRAND NEW KIT

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A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £40 MORE TRY:**
7iDP Control £99.99
www.decade-europe.com

▼ **FOR £10 LESS TRY:**
SixSixOne Rage £49.99
www.hotlines-uk.com

Alpinestars Alps 2 knee pads

£59.99 i-ride www.i-ride.co.uk

WITH GOOD COVERAGE, a secure fit and decent price, what's not to like about the Alps 2 pads? Not a lot really. Alpinestars have combined a pre-shaped knee cup and open-backed sleeve with two Velcro straps to create a seriously hard to budge fit. Wide silicone strips inside the upper and lower openings help keep them put too.

When we did sample the soil, the pads soaked up the impact

and didn't slip or twist on our knees. Get pedalling and the lower Velcro strap can creep up a little, irritating the back of the knee and requiring readjustment every so often. It's more than forgivable though, considering how comfy the pads are for the most part. Still, it'd be good to see a softer and more comfortable lower strap used in future to prevent this.

Even though the stretchy mesh sleeve is cut away at the

rear, the pad doesn't splay when your knee is fully flexed, keeping the padding exactly where it needs to be. To either side of the main knee cup Alpinestars have added extra foam padding to take care of those awkward knocks and bumps. **ROB**

Well priced and comfy (for the most part) with a secure fit and plenty of well padded coverage



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MBUK WRECKED & RATED

Brand New Kit

THE SMALL STUFF MTB BITS AND PIECES



MUC-OFF AMINO EXPLOSIVE POWER

£24 www.muc-off.com

Rubbed onto your muscles, this thick cream is designed to increase blood flow and boost strength and performance. Though the science is convincing, we felt little benefit. You'll need to be a serious racer to invest in this. **JIMMER**

MBUK ★★☆☆☆



LEZYNE CLASSIC PEDAL ROD

£17.99 **Upgrade Bikes**
www.upgradebikes.co.uk

This spanner's long wooden handle gives enough leverage to get even the most stubborn pedals off. The two 15mm offset openings and bottle opener are handy, and the solid build means it should last for years. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★★



TECH21 PATRIOT iPhone 5/5S CASE

£39.99 **Tech21** www.tech21.com

Even with its built-in screen protector, this rubberised case allows easy access to the phone's buttons and ports, which are well protected to stop dust and spray getting in. It's less bulky than others on the market yet the protection is still good. **JAMER**

MBUK ★★★★★



MBUK
MOST
WANTED

Morvélo Factory jersey

£60 **Morvélo** www.morvelo.com

MAKING AN ENDURO/downhill jersey that stands out from the crowd is an increasingly difficult trick and that's part of the reason we like Morvélo's Factory so much. Like a lot of the Brighton-based clobber concern's garments, it's technically up to date yet still pays due homage to some old-school roots.

Most importantly, the fit is extremely good. The sleeves and chest are a good length and snug as opposed to tight. The DriClim polyester fabric wicks

sweat well and is as at home in an uplift bus as it is cranking up to the start of stage five. We especially appreciated the large zip pocket hidden discreetly at the rear – it's easy to access and big enough to stash van keys (clipped to the in-built karabiner) and an energy bar in should you dare to venture out sans pack. Reflective detailing and pack-gripping shoulder abrasion guards round out an impressive performance. **RIC**

MBUK ★★★★★



Torc1 Racing Defy grips

£22 **Torc1Racing**
www.torc1racing.co.uk

TORC1 MAKE ALL manner of motocross parts and have decided to dip their toes into the mountain bike market with the Defy lock-ons. An inboard single lock-on clamp is fixed with a 3mm Allen bolt, while an integrated bar end plug sits at the other end of the grip. The heavily textured, knurled pattern is comfortable without feeling too bulky and performance has been impressive even in the wet. The soft rubber compound is wearing well and at £22 they're well worth a look. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★★★

Bontrager Rhythm gloves

£24.99 **Bontrager** www.bontrager.com



IF MINIMALIST GLOVES are your thing, then Bontrager's Rhythms could be worth a look. The four-panel synthetic leather palm has well-placed seams that follow the contours of your hand and do a good job of preventing bunching. There's a small amount of ventilation in the palm but the breathable upper handles most of the cooling. Articulated knuckles and full-finger grip strips on the first two fingers (and thumb) help with brake lever traction. The cuff is cut low

and, with the absence of any Velcro tab, offers unhindered rotation of the wrist. A soft snot wipe on the thumb makes comfortable work of any mid-ride wipeages. During hot summer rides they've remained suitably cool and not particularly clammy thanks to the fast-wicking material. After several washes and regular use the Rhythms remain in good nick too. Most importantly, they're comfy for long periods. **MATT**

MBUK ★★★★★

BRAND NEW KIT



Club Ride Cargo Away shorts

£52 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

CLUB RIDE'S CARGO Away shorts are just on the right side of loose-fitting, with a perfectly shaped waistband that can be fine tuned via a low-profile side buckle. The 13in inseam meant the legs ended just off the knee on our tester. The lightweight stretch material dries quickly during summer showers, and even with a mud-laden ass, the great fit ensures the shorts

don't sag down. The fabric wicks well too. They do ride up a little when pedalling but stay comfortable throughout long stints in the saddle. The two flat, zipped cargo pockets can hold light items. We love the subtle pinstripe pattern. The lack of a liner is a shame, though understandable at this price. **JIMMER**

MBUK ★★★★★

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MRP AMg (V2) chain guide

£99.99 Ison Distribution www.ison-distribution.com

TODAY'S CHAIN-RETAINING

chainrings and clutch rear mechs do a great job of keeping your chain on, but sometimes it pays to be prepared for the unexpected, and this is where the AMg comes in. This top-only enduro/trail guide is designed to give additional insurance on rough terrain.

The V2 guide is 20g lighter (120g) than its predecessor and has an integrated skid plate to prevent damage to the transmission from rock and stump strikes. The guide itself is now smaller and has a softer plastic inner to reduce noise. MRP offer versions for ISCG and ISCG-05 mounts, and 32-38t (tested) and 26-32t chainrings. Installation takes minutes and only requires a 4mm Allen key.

In the hills, the V2 was silent from the offset and the extra protection provided by the lower skid plate was a confidence booster when negotiating nasty boulder fields or tricky off-piste sections. The lack of a lower guide or roller never caused any issues with chain loss on our clutch mech equipped test bike, and things ran smoothly throughout testing. **OLLY**

Pricey but with benchmark quality and feel, the AMg (V2) could be the icing on the cake for enduro racers

★★★★★

MBUK
MOST WANTED



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A LOOK AT

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www.silverfish-uk.com

▼ FOR £30 LESS TRY:
Gamut Trail SXR £69.99
www.madison.co.uk

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"A good pair of gloves should offer all day, unrestricted comfort, survive regular spins in the washing machine and, ultimately, help to protect your hands. Here are six to choose from..."



£23.99

ION Path

ION Products www.ion-products.com

SO GOOD... The Path's thin, close knit, stretchy upper helps create a light, airy feel that adds to this glove's already impressive comfort. The small Velcro closure and minimal cuff go largely unnoticed when riding, while the thin, well-shaped palm ensures there's next to no bunching and plenty of feedback through the grips.

NO GOOD... Reinforcement around the thumb bolsters durability but does mean things can feel a little tight. In the wet, the normally grippy silicone dot pattern that covers the palm can become slippery. This means you have to hold the bar that bit harder, which isn't ideal.

MBUK ★★★★★



£29.95

Race Face Stage

Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com

SO GOOD... The shaping and fit of the Stage is great. Race Face have reinforced the palm in high wear areas without affecting overall comfort and the glove still maintains that thin, feedback-rich feel we love. Though the stretchy upper lends itself to warmer rides in terms of thickness it still does a good job of keeping you cool, as well as shrugging off bramble snags. Little touches like the conductive patch on the middle finger for using a smartphone and the lengthy snot wipe are nice.

NO GOOD... The thick, elasticated upper part of the cuff feels unnecessarily tight and is prone to getting sweaty quickly too.

MBUK ★★★★★



£19.99

100% Ridefit Corpo

Decade Europe www.decade-europe.com

SO GOOD... Despite the appealing price, the Ridefit glove has a lot to offer, including a well shaped, hand hugging fit, a thin one-piece palm and some reinforcement between the index finger and thumb. There's little bunching when gripping the handlebar, and as well as being breathable the stretchy upper adds to overall comfort. The thin neoprene cuff and small Velcro tab closure never once bothered us either.

NO GOOD... After a few light bramble snags our gloves have a couple of frayed stitches on the uppers. The lack of snot wipe may not be to everyone's liking either.

MBUK ★★★★★



£19.99

Alpinestars F-Lite

i-ride www.i-ride.co.uk

SO GOOD... This is another glove that comes in just under the £20 mark and offers a lot of bang for your buck. The thin, one piece, perforated palm feels great on the grips, transmitting plenty of feedback. There's barely any bunching, which helps ensure all-day comfort. The stretchy upper hugs the back of the hand and is breathable enough to prevent things getting too clammy on warmer rides, and the cuffless wrist helps keep movement free and easy.

NO GOOD... The thick silicone strips on the index/middle fingers and thumb can get a little slippery in the wet.

MBUK ★★★★★



£34.99

Troy Lee Designs Ace

Fisher Outdoor Leisure www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

SO GOOD... With a close, well cut shape and lightweight build, the Ace feels like a second skin. The thin palm is perforated in places to help dump heat on sweater days, and also features some additional – albeit minimal – padding at the base of the ring and little fingers, which we never noticed when riding. We really like the Lycra panel that sits just over the wrist – it's super-comfy against the skin and helps to make movement free and easy around the cuffless wrist.

NO GOOD... The price may put some off. Not everyone liked the feel of the conductive patch on the end of the thumb.

MBUK ★★★★★



£25

Fox Attack

Fox www.foxhead.com

SO GOOD... If you like thin gloves the Attack won't disappoint – its one-piece perforated palm is well shaped and doesn't bunch when clinging onto the bar. This glove is as slight as they come and hugs every contour of your hand, making it really comfy. Though the cuffless wrist section isn't particularly stretchy, the thin material means movement is unrestricted. It's surprisingly tough too, showing no signs of wear so far.

NO GOOD... There's not much stretch in the cuffless wrist, which means slipping them on isn't as easy as it could be if you have wide hands.

MBUK ★★★★★



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MODEL SHOWN

Sram Guide | Avid XO Trail |
Avid Elixir 7 Trail | Avid Elixir 9 Trail



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MBUK Machines

We ride these long-term test bikes hard for a year, constantly scrutinising new kit, to bring you nothing but the truth about their performance

2015

SPECIAL EDITION

After six months of hard riding, it's time for an in-depth update on our long-termers



It's been a full six months since we introduced our 2015 fleet of long-term test bikes (or most of them, at least), giving plenty of time for us to get to know them intimately – warts and all. These bikes haven't exactly had an easy life. We've hammered them down hills, dragged them across beaches and rattled them across moors up and down the country to see just how much punishment they'll take. As we're now halfway through our testing period with this crop of bikes, it's time for a more detailed update on how they're coping and just what we've been up to.



CANYON STRIVE CF 9.0 RACE

£3,746.98 Canyon www.canyon.com

It may not be a full six months since I got the Canyon but I've clocked up a decent amount of saddle time since it landed with me. I've noticed that I now need to make more pronounced weight shifts in order to switch the Shapeshifter travel and geometry adjust system from cross-country to downhill mode, and vice versa. It may be that I just need to top up the air pressure, because up until recently it had been working just fine. I'll keep you posted. Aside from that, everything remains in good working order, which goes to show just what a solid, well put together package the Strive really is.



With a 2016 Fox fork and shock, the Phoenix is riding better than ever

PIVOT PHOENIX

£2,700 (frame only) Upgrade Bikes www.upgradebikes.co.uk

I'm pleased to say that the Phoenix seems to be handling the abuse I've been dishing out well. I'm really comfortable with the angles and sizing, and feel like I can just jump aboard and crack on. The prospect of having to maintain all those DW-Link pivots does make me a little nervous, but they're still running smoothly, even after multiple sideways landings.

Upgrade Bikes shipped the Pivot to me with an X-Fusion RV1 fork, which I really got on well with. I was keen to keep it bolted in up front but testing duties meant otherwise. A box from Fox arrived for me containing their new 40 Float RC2 FIT fork and DHX2 shock. I've ridden the first iteration of the air-sprung 40 a lot but have been really impressed with the feel of the newly refined fork. It's so smooth off the top and tracks the ground

superbly. At just 2.73kg it's helped to reduce the weight of the Phoenix to an impressive 15.1kg (33.3lb), making things even livelier on the trail. The new coil shock is equally exciting. After a morning fiddling with settings and spring weights with the Mojo crew I managed to get the Pivot feeling nicely balanced and really good.

That same day I also tried the new Float X2 air shock. Though I was happy with the DHX2, I was blown away by how good the Float X2 felt. The chatter I'd been feeling through the pedals in rougher turns seemed to be eliminated, leaving me with more grip and confidence.

I know these are quite significant changes but they've elevated the Phoenix from good to great and I really can't get enough of riding it at the minute.

HIGHS

■ All the pivots seem to be holding up well and are running smoothly without any play or creaking

■ Fox's 2016 downhill fork and shock are both seriously smooth and controlled, boosting grip and handling confidence

■ It's hard to fault the geometry of the Pivot, especially that low slung BB, which feels great through the turns

LOWS

■ The only real issue I've had with the set up was the lack of grip in the wet with the original Bontrager G4 tyres. I've slapped on some better all rounders
Maxxis Shorty 3C TR EXOs



SCOTT SPARK 700 ULTIMATE DI2

£8,499 Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com

During the few months I've had this cross-country whippet I've yet to snag a wire or bend a mech, very much to my relief. I don't think I've ever been as paranoid about damaging a bike as I have with the Spark. I'm really into the Scott though and love its eagerness to cover ground quickly. I'm still on the fence when it comes to the Shimano XTR Di2 electronic transmission though. Do we really need electric shifting? I'm just not sure. For high-mileage riding where a double or triple crankset is essential, the Di2 system and its Syncroshift function is superb, with one shifter letting you use every gear option you have (Syncroshift lets you program at what point while shifting through the cassette the front mech shifts between chainrings). For general trail riding, I'm not convinced the benefits justify the expense.



Olly's off so he has to hand the Reign back – and he's gutted!



OLLY'S

GIANT REIGN 1

£3,999 Giant Bicycles www.giant-bicycles.com

HIGHS

■ Aggressive geometry lets you blast the descents

■ Monarch Plus shock is sensitive enough to keep the rear wheel glued to the ground but still sucks up big hits and landings

■ SRAM X1 has a great gear range and is durable too

LOWS

■ DPA Pike is good but not as good as the Solo Air fork.

■ £4k is a lot of money when you can get better specced bikes online for less

■ DT Swiss's XM wheels don't stand up to abuse as well as their EXs

Is this one of the best 160mm (6.3in) bikes on the market right now? It's certainly one of the best I've ridden, which is a sentiment shared by just about anyone who gets to spend any time on one. But before I go on about why the Reign rules, let's touch on a couple of hard truths. Firstly, £4,000 is a lot for an alloy bike, especially in the age of the sub £3K carbon YT Capra. Secondly, while it's relatively light – sub 30lb (13.6kg) out of the box – at this price I'd expect it to come with the best parts available, and there are a couple of spec choices that I find a bit odd.

While I love RockShox's Pike fork, I prefer the Solo Air variety to the adjustable-travel Dual Position Air version that comes as standard on the Reign. The DPA fork has a very linear stroke and you can't add any of RockShox's Bottomless Tokens to make it more progressive, as you can with the Solo Air fork. DT Swiss wheels are a big favourite of mine too,

but why the lighter XM trail rims, Giant? Surely a bike of this nature deserves the brand's burlier EX enduro rims – they'd probably still be on the bike if they'd come as stock, unlike the XMs.

So what else frustrates me about this bike? Just the fact that I have to give it back, because this really is one hell of a machine. The rest of the spec hasn't missed a beat. Great transmission, reliable brakes, superb tyres, the best dropper post on the market and that RockShox Monarch Plus DebonAir rear shock – I really love that shock! With a Solo Air Pike and some EX rims I'd just about forget the price, because it's that bloody good! It climbs, it descends, you can send big jumps, conquer wild, off-piste terrain and disappear into the woods for hours.

I'm leaving MBUK so my time on the Reign has drawn to a close, but it's set a new benchmark for how I judge any similar bike from here on in.



NS FUZZ 1

£3,400 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

From the offset, the Fuzz's sorted geometry and handling made me sit up and take notice. On the flipside, the ability to simply jump on the NS and rip up the descents was somewhat hampered by its 17.2kg (37.9lb) weight and difficulties dialling in the fork.

The Marzocchi 380 C2R2 is a really good fork, but it's just not for me. With adjustable low- and high-speed compression and rebound damping it needs careful set-up, and no matter

what I did with the dials, I found it too sensitive and lacking in the support I need for my aggressive riding style. The crown and stanchion design also limits the amount you can adjust the ride height by, which is annoying. Add the overcomplicated direct-mount stem, which requires the bar to be fed in from the side, and this all meant I spent more time faffing with the bike in a workstand than out shredding – never a good situation to be in.



GUY'S

WHYTE T-130 SX

£1,999 **Whyte Bikes** whyte.bike

HIGHS

■ The T-130's mix of responsive eagerness and 'get it done' determination always puts a grin on our faces

■ Whyte will replace the bearings for free, but so far there's no hint of wobble

LOWS

■ 'Stealth' dropper is a bonus on a £2k bike but X-Fusion HiLo was unreliable

■ The T-130 is pretty compact so we're interested to see how the longer 2016 versions ride

■ Suntour fork's Q-LOC axle can get sticky if not kept clean and lubed

Whyte's most affordable mid-travel trail bike has been on our northern long-term test team roster for a full year now but you wouldn't know it from its ride performance or the amount of workshop time it's had.

The paint job has held up well apart from a cable rub patch where we forgot to fit a protective sticker and despite a brutal year of battering the bearings are all fine. Thanks to a very long stroke and low compression ratio, the Fox rear shock has sucked up a whole year of lairy moments and awkward landings without even a pull-apart and wipe. The Whyte branded hubs have held up fine and the WTB rims are still round and relatively dent free.

After a slightly stubborn start and another sticky interlude a few months back the Suntour Aion fork is still working OK. It definitely lacks sensitivity at lower pressures under lighter riders though, so I've just

switched to Marzocchi's latest 320 LCR, complete with their new NOK single seals. That's made a big difference to sensitivity straight away and it's also saved over 500g. I've had a few months on the Wolf Tooth single ring and big cassette sprocket kit I fitted now too and all the blue bits are going great.

While the original Whyte bar was fine, the T-130 inherited a carbon Ragley Wiser during gear testing and I liked it so much it's stayed. It's the same story with the Kenda tyre mix. In fact, the only bit I truly needed to change was the X-Fusion dropper post. Getting a 'stealth' (internally routed) dropper on a £2k bike is impressive but the reliability was rubbish. The Whyte is now wearing an externally routed Specialized Command Post IR instead, which has been great as long as I remember its crotch crushing return speed. In summary then, it's been a rock solid

year for the T-130, but I'm interested to see how the longer 2016 versions ride because I love the stretched geometry of Whyte's G-150 enduro rig and 901 hardtail.



The T-130 SX is no featherweight but it's well built and tons of fun



GT FORCE X CARBON EXPERT

£3,499.99 **GT Bicycles** www.gtbicycles.com

I drafted in GT's big trail/all-mountain bike to deal with our bigger hitting group tests – long-travel forks, tough tyres and hammer-proof wheels. That means it's been all over the country battering a broad selection of kit, and if I'm not riding it, it'll generally be on a weekend trail centre mission with one of our northern wrecking crew.

The kit list is currently all about second chances, with Manitou's Mattoc fork and DMR's Drone wheels working hard to re-establish their

reliability reputation after problems with our initial samples. It's also sporting Hope's new cranks, and Spank's Vibrocore bar has stayed on after testing because I love it.

Taking kit to the limit means I've been hammering the GT to the ragged edge on every ride. Despite its complex floating drivetrain design it's stayed totally smooth and shudder free. I really need to get the Fox Float X shock serviced though – it's been a saggy, oily mess for a while now.



JCW'S

STANTON SHERPA 853

£500 (frame only) Stanton Bikes www.stantonbikes.com

For my first long-term I was hoping to find a frame that rode similarly to my 26in Cotic Soul, but with the added speed of 29in wheels. With my initial build on the Stanton I ended up with a different kettle of fish entirely.

While the Soul has a distinctly supple feel out back, the Sherpa is noticeably more rigid (though nowhere near as harsh as some alloy frames). This stiffness, combined with my choice of burly Hope Tech Enduro wheels and low-profile rear tyre, made the rougher trails I came across on my early rides bone-rattling affairs.

I shouldn't have been surprised. It may be billed as an XC/trail frame, but Stanton are known for their take-no-prisoners hardcore hardtails so the Sherpa was always going to be more suited to confronting trouble head on than tiptoeing around it. The flipside of

this stiffness is a direct pedalling feel that makes it easy to sprint the oversize hoops up to speed and means you're always aware of exactly what's going on under your rear wheel. My Sherpa is no lightweight, at nearly 29lb with chunky CrankBros Mallet pedals, but it doesn't feel heavy once it's rolling, and it's reassuringly stiff and stable when things get sketchy.

Two upgrades have made a big difference. Fitting a tall, high volume Maxxis Ardent tyre has added some welcome cushioning out back as well as shedloads more grip, while switching to a Thomson Elite Dropper post has made it much easier to throw the XL frame around. I still wish it had a bit more standover room though.

My plans are to see what difference some lighter wheels and dropping the fork travel down to 100mm makes.

HIGHS

■ This 'trail/XC' frame has taken everything from tech singletrack to jumpy descents in its stride

■ Maxxis tyres have added extra grip and cushioning

■ Dropper post has made the XL frame a lot easier to throw around

LOWS

■ I've struggled to set the Hope rims up tubeless, despite other testers reporting no problems

■ Tough but heavy wheels and tyres give a sluggish feel on flatter trails

■ Limited reach means I've had to fit a 70mm stem



INTENSE CARBINE 29 EXPERT

£5,299 Extra (UK) www.extrauk.co.uk

The Carbine is a relatively new addition to the MBUK arsenal but it's already proven its calibre on quick blasts around Cannock, Cwmcar, the Forest of Dean and the trails near our base in Bristol. The stock spec is pretty sorted but the big wheels and XL frame mean it's not particularly light so I'm going to put it on a bit of a diet to take it below the magic 30lb (13.6kg) mark. I've set it up tubeless and a single-ring conversion is in the pipeline. I'll be changing the cockpit too – the 740mm bar isn't wide enough for my liking, especially on a 29er.

SURLY ICE CREAM TRUCK OPS

£2,199.99 Ison Distribution
www.ison-distribution.com

'Love' is a strong word for any commitment-phobe, but after nine months of devotion to (almost) just this one bike, I'm pretty sure it could be the one.

Unless you've ridden a fatbike – and I'm talking doing more than just a lap of a trail centre car park – I realise this may be difficult to understand. They aren't faster than regular trail bikes, they can be hard work and there are times when a bit of suspension would be nice. But if you're anything like me, they'll leave you smiling from ear to ear on anything you ride. And by anything I mean pretty much a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g! I've raced the ICT in the Arctic and at the beach. I've bikepacked, ridden epic cross-country loops, explored local trails, razed trail centres and



MATT'S

Fatbike-mad Matt only has eyes for one bike now

even slogged my 40km daily commute on it.

The ICT is unabashedly versatile. While it excels in snow, it surprises in other environments too. My most recent adventure at the inaugural Beach Breaker race in Inaugal required a crash diet. I managed to shed just

under 2kg from the bike's weight by fitting a ridiculously light (530g) Travers Fat Prong fork and H1 titanium handlebar, and slimming the wheels from 82mm wide Surly Rolling Darryls to 65mm Marge Lites on Hope Fatsno hubs. The result was a significantly more nimble ride.

HIGHS

■ Long and slack (for a fatbike) geometry is designed for the most fun possible

■ RockShox's Bluto fork is a game changer for fatbikes and Surly's suspension corrected geometry makes it a must have

■ Ability to run a 12mm, QR or singlespeed hub and up to 5in tyres adds versatility

LOWS

■ Stock bar and stem (740/80mm) hold the ICT back

■ Obscure 94BCD chainring size limits replacement options, though Surly have a 28t ring landing soon

■ microSHIFT thumbies wouldn't be my first choice

HIGHS

■ New Renthal cockpit has put me in a much better, more confident riding position

■ Reducing the air volume in the shock and fitting a stiffer fork has unlocked the Marin's potential

■ KS LEV dropper post has been brilliant since day one and continues to impress with no maintenance

LOWS

■ Frame comes up a little on the short side compared to 140mm bikes from other brands

■ Stock bar and stem were too narrow and long

■ Skinny Fox 32 fork just didn't cut it when the trails got wild



JIMMER'S

MARIN MOUNT VISION C-XM8

£3,500 Paligap www.paligap.cc

I'm not the best mechanic and I'll hold my hand up and admit that I don't clean R2 (or any of my bikes) as regularly as I should. "I'll do it later" is my usual excuse as I focus on a well-earned beer instead. The past six months have been tough on the trusty Mount Vision. I'm known to crash on the odd occasion, so it's with a sense of amazement that the Marin still rides so smoothly and is in such good shape.

The 140mm (5.5in) of Fox travel front and rear has been pushed to its

limit, and while R2 climbs really well, I have to finesse my way through rough terrain. This is no bad thing really, because it keeps me on my toes and makes me pick better lines. Fitting a large volume spacer in the Fox shock to make it more progressive has made bigger drops and fast rocky trails far more palatable at speed. Replacing the stock Fox 32 fork with a burlier Fox 34 has opened up a new world of speed and control, though it has made me wonder why Marin

Some suspension tweaks have helped unlock R2's potential



didn't spec the bike with a beefier fork in the first place.

The Shimano XT transmission has been faultless, and I'm still running the stock dual-ring set-up until I can get hold of an 11-speed upgrade. I miss the simplicity of a 1x11 transmission, and it should help eliminate clatter and chainslap on descents too. The Schwalbe Nobby Nic Evo PaceStar SnakeSkin tyres have done a sterling job so far too, only freaking out on wet roots and rocks (as do I). Trying to locate a grippier TrailStar version for the front is proving difficult though – they're clearly popular tyres.

Changing the stock 760mm bar and 70mm stem for a 780mm Renthal Fatbar Carbon and 50mm Apex stem has made a big difference, correcting a slightly awkward riding position and putting me in a far better stance on the bike. I'm looking forward to the rest of summer.

VITUS SOMMET VRX

£2,699 Vitus Bikes
www.vitusbikes.com

Six months into our time together and I can't help but be extremely impressed with the Sommet. The spec sheet is a lesson in no-frills competence – Shimano SLX brakes have all the power you need and remain fade free, the SRAM X1 drivetrain hasn't warranted a single adjustment and the suspension was quick to set up and easy to tune in. That said, I'm on my third Marzocchi 350 fork due to weird wear on the 'Espresso' stanchion coating.

Although hot down south at times, the summer in Scotland has been a warm if wet affair and the semi-slick WTB Trail Boss rear tyre is struggling to cope. I switched the front Vigilante to a heavier casing version early in the test. If I was really nit-picking I'd point to the slightly awkward cable routing that sees the RockShox Reverb Stealth cable pinch in the seat tube, leaving the post unable to return



RIC'S

The Vitus is a real workhorse – and we don't mean that in a negative way

when fully dropped into the frame. The paint finish has dulled slightly too, but then this is a bike that's been used, loved and abused, so I'd expect it to have done so by now.

Apart from some cockpit changes, in the shape of a suite of Renthal controls, she's largely unchanged,

which when I think back to previous long-term machines is a truly remarkable feat. Calling the Vitus 'workmanlike' then sounds unfair and somehow undersells its ability to go absolutely flat out, without any fuss or drama, whenever the notion to let the brakes off takes you.

HIGHS

■ Spec is solid, dependable and great for going fast

■ Suspension is easy to dial in and performs well on a mixture of terrain

■ SRAM 1x11 drivetrain has been fault free and barely needed any adjustment

LOWS

■ I'm onto my third Marzocchi fork due to stanchion coating wear

■ I've swapped to a heavier front tyre and the rear semi slick is struggling too

■ The Reverb Stealth dropper seatpost cable pinches in the seat tube when fully dropped



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THE LINE-UP



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GHOST AMR LT 6 LC
£2,699.99



WHYTE T-129 RS £2,750



MONDRAKER CRAFTY R
£2,799

Words Guy Kesteven Pics Mick Kirkman

CAN BIG WHEELS EQUAL BIG FUN?



We're still stunned by how fast it happened, but when 650b wheels hit the mainstream, 26in bikes were pretty much made obsolete overnight in terms of sales. Smoother rolling, naturally faster 29ers seemed a more resilient breed, especially among faster riders. But each season more of our favourite big-wheelers – such as the Norco Shinobi, Giant Anthem 29, Lapierre Zesty TR 29 and Trek

Remedy 29 – have vanished or dwindled to just one model, and even the mighty Tallboy LT is off the Santa Cruz roster at the moment. Even brands such as Whyte and Orange who are retaining large-radius wheels admit life would be much easier with just one wheel size to think about. XC start lines are still all about big wheels though, and some of the most capable, fastest trail bikes are 29ers. So do big wheels still have a big future? We hit the trails to find out. »



THE TESTER

Guy Kesteven

Our northern test engine is more about big miles and big speed on wild trails than big air at BMX style trail centres, which makes 29ers a perfect fit for him and his TNFC wrecking crew.

Bike Test

29ER TRAIL BIKES
£2,600-£2,800

SPEC SURPRISE

The KS LEV Integra seatpost is a real help on steeper descents, but that's not the Ghost's natural haunt

CRUISE CONTROLS

The Ghost's tall, narrow cockpit is optimised for comfortable, upright miles, not technical trail tenacity

ALL-NEW NICS

Schwalbe's reworked Nobby Nic tyres roll much better than you'd expect but still give predictable all-conditions grip

GHOST AMR LT 6 LC

£2,699.99

Classic Continental 'fully' built for high-mileage cruising, but easily spooked



So Good

Clear division between pillowy comfort and firm pedalling will suit some riders

Mechanically durable kit for long-distance riding

No Good

Linear rear suspension is hard to tune for supportive feedback

Narrow bar and flexy frame undermine confidence



JARGON BUSTER

Low-speed damping

Controls how suspension reacts to low-energy loads such as pedalling movement or cornering and braking forces.

G-out

Extra downward force exerted when you and the bike compress at the bottom of a dip.

Ghost's AMR is a long running, long distance machine honed for the German marathon mountain biking scene. The LT version adds suspension travel and a dropper post for theoretically increased trail control but how does that play out in practice?

The frame

The carbon mainframe follows a classic smooth curved, melted looking format, with a large-diameter down tube leading to a press-fit bottom bracket. The linkage driven shock is mounted relatively high and the asymmetric main pivot demands a kinked seat tube with an in-moulded support strut off the tapering top tube. Mud clearance is limited by the bridge above the triangular seatstays and the rearward front mech mount. Cabling is all internal but sticks out enough at the front to knock knees out of the saddle.

The kit

The suspension is a Fox Float Evolution double act, making for theoretically easy syncing of the triple-mode low-speed compression damping. A Shimano XT crankset and rear mech provide the keystones of the 2x10

transmission but there's lower grade Deore kit 'hidden' in the mix, which adds weight. The dual-compound grips are remarkably uncomfortable on even slightly rough trails, but given the low replacement cost that's hardly a deal breaker. The Ghost-logoed rims are actually made by Ryde, which is fine by us. Buyers should make sure to keep the bearings on the weighty rear hub properly adjusted to reap their smooth long-term potential. The inclusion of an internally routed KS LEV Integra dropper post adds mass but suggests a more aggressive attitude than you might expect of a German 29er.

The ride

Unfortunately, the first contact with the Ghost is somewhat scary, particularly if you're in dark and dangerous woods. The 700mm riser bar and 80mm stem lift your hands high and sit you upright, making for a comfortable cruising position but pulling commitment and confidence away from the front wheel.

Removing all the steerer spacers and flipping the stem gave a more aggressive body position but we still felt underpowered in terms of steering leverage when swapping back and

forth between bikes. Even when we experimented with a slightly wider bar and shorter stem to mimic the cockpit of the BMC, the Ghost still felt like a very different bike.

The curving frame tubes, narrow linkage and skinny stays are clearly not as stiff as those on the Swiss machine. Even with grippier tyres than the Speedfox, the flex makes it harder to hold a line and react accurately to the distorted feedback through the frame. It also makes it more difficult for the underpowered front end and relatively long and stable rear end to create a consistent response or predictable character through each section of trail.

The suspension is very on/off in feel too. The fully open 'descend' lever position on the Extra Volume sleeved Fox shock is very soft and linear. That means you need to run a lot of pressure to stop the bike wallowing around and blowing through its travel. In contrast, 'trail' mode is very stiff, leaving it clattering and banging over small bumps at medium pressures, and rendering the firmer 'climb' position largely redundant.

Even at high pressures, relatively small but sudden high-speed hits and G-outs will blow the sag ring right off



**EVEN WITH THE DROPPER POST WE WERE
REACHING FOR THE BRAKES AND BACKING OFF A LOT
EARLIER ON THE GHOST THAN THE OTHER BIKES**

the end of the shock with little resistance. There's a damping sweet spot of sorts if you work on getting it right in either 'descend' or 'trail' mode (not both) but it's definitely the hardest bike here to find a happy medium on. This combines with the compromised steering control to mean that even with the dropper post, we were reaching for the brakes and backing off a lot earlier on the Ghost than the other bikes here on technical trails.

Keep the AMR LT on less demanding trails and it's definitely happier. The

Ryde rims are light enough to accelerate OK and it pedals fine if the suspension is sorted to stop bob. While they look like open-knobbed mud tyres, Schwalbe's redesigned Nobby Nics are surprisingly quick rolling. They'll still pull predictably reliable traction out of a wide range of trail surfaces, and turn tubeless easily too.

The long top tube stretch and naturally upright position translate to lots of breathing space on long climbs. The 2x10 transmission gives smaller gear jumps and a lower crawler gear

than 1x11 systems, which long-distance spinners will appreciate. The extra chainring, shifter and front mech are enough to nullify most of the weight loss advantage of the carbon mainframe when you compare the Ghost to the single ringed, alloy framed Whyte though.

»

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A smooth cruiser with distinctively hard or soft suspension, but easily spooked on scarier trails



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ZERO COMPLAINTS

Mondraker's twin-link suspension system is impressively controlled and keeps weight as low and central as possible

TINY TILLER

The 30mm stem is actually the longer option in Mondraker's minimum reach, maximum control Forward Geometry masterplan

SPEC UPSET

The 2015 Fox 34 fork is seriously heavy and the narrow rims and 2x10 drivetrain really don't suit the Crafty's radical ride potential

MONDRAKER CRAFTY R

£2,799

Mondraker's big-wheeler has serious max speed, max control potential

**So Good**

Incredible high-speed stability and confident control

Impressively balanced and consistent suspension

No Good

Narrow wheels and notchy fork

High weight means strength or gravity are needed to keep the Crafty awake

**JARGON BUSTER****High-speed damping**

Controls how suspension reacts to high-energy loads that make it compress quickly, such as rocks, roots and drops.

Hang-up

When a wheel gets caught on an obstacle or doesn't return fast enough from an impact due to slow damping or inertia caused by high weight.

Mondraker's Forward Geometry equipped Crafty R stretches 29er handling to the radical max, but can the rest of the bike match up?

The frame

The main feature of Mondraker's Forward Geometry designs is the ultra-long top tube, which allows a super-short stem to be fitted as standard. The Zero suspension system drives the shock back and down through the split seat tube onto a small lower linkage, and the rear triangle is stretched to accommodate the biggest 29er tyres. Despite a deliberately lightened 'Stealth 2.0' tubeset the frame is adequately stiff for full-gas riding, with slight rear flex only obvious during low rev, high torque efforts. It's lifetime warrantied too, leaving only the easy-to-lose rear axle plug to grumble about.

The kit

Unfortunately the kit list gives plenty of grumbling potential. The Evolution spec Fox 34 fork is extremely heavy and not particularly smooth, the DT Swiss 1900 rims aren't wide enough to adequately support the 2.4in Maxxis

Ardent tyres and even with a clutch mech, the 2x10 transmission seems determined to ditch its down-specced chain every time the Crafty gets into its stride. The cassette is a heavy 'hidden' downgrade too, and contributes to a leg-crushing overall weight. Despite a dreadful reliability reputation, the X-Fusion dropper post is still running after several months though.

The ride

Mondraker's extended geometry always makes for big bikes. Add big wheels with big tyres and you're looking at a proper beast. At 14.49kg (31.95lb) the Crafty is almost a kilo heavier than the next heaviest bike on test and its wheelbase is 45mm longer. It's so big that even the 760mm bar feels like a bare minimum for coaxing it around slower, tighter trails, and steering it is a serious chore.

The trick is to avoid steering at all. That's not as suicidal as it sounds, because the Crafty comes alive when you stop trying to lever it round conventionally and use the 30mm stem to snap the front wheel off line and 'trip' the bike into corners. Once you start treating every turn like a bar dragging competition this previously

stubborn beast roars into raging life.

The huge wheelbase and 29in wheels provide outrageous levels of stability that you'll struggle to believe and properly commit to at first. Force yourself to leave the brakes untouched though, and the micro stem and relatively steep 68.5-degree head angle mean you actually have a surprising amount of traction tweaking, line adjusting control within the surging flood of flow that's rushing you down the trail.

The faster you go, the more Forward Geometry makes sense, but that has consequences for the rest of the bike. We can see the logic of easy rolling, low tread tyres in terms of offsetting overall weight. Big volume also provides extra pneumatic protection. The skinny rims mean you have to keep pressures high for stability though, and the front tyre washes away earlier than you'd want.

The high-speed compression damping of the fork really struggles to cope with the amplified impacts the extra entry speed of the Crafty generates on rocky terrain. Because the bike is so long and heavy, it's hard to lift or manual. This can leave the Fox 34 chattering and choking when it



TREAT EVERY TURN LIKE A BAR DRAGGING COMPETITION AND THIS PREVIOUSLY STUBBORN BEAST ROARS INTO RAGING LIFE

feels like the bike still has way more to give. The heavy rear wheel can also hang up and batter around behind you on sustained staccato rock and root sections. The overexuberant speed you need to get rid of and the hammering fork front put a lot of pressure on the brakes, and a 200mm front rotor upgrade is recommended if you don't want a cramped right hand halfway down a big hill. The Crafty also throws the chain off its 2x10

transmission with irritatingly regularity, so fitting a chain guide to the ISCG mounts or going single ring (or both) is an essential move.

The 130mm (5.1in) of multi-link Zero suspension travel is impressively controlled and balanced in terms of sucking the bike onto the ground while still feeling stable and responsive. The Mondraker pedals very well too, letting you concentrate on navigating the extra bike length up more nadgery

sections. There's no escaping that hefty complete bike weight though, and a fair amount of rear end flex under power means you need to be a strong rider to get the Crafty going fast enough to ignite its potential and then keep it there. »

MBUK

Potentially crazy confidence and speed, but undermined by component compromises and weight



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ROCK SOLID

The BMC's carbon mainframe and alloy rear triangle give outstandingly clear and precise feedback

DEVIL IN THE DETAIL

Impressive detailing includes interchangeable internal cable ducts, inset rear brake mounts and a direct-mount rear mech

TAUT TRAVEL

Short, stiff, symmetrical linkages create a tight, consistently controlled and pedalling friendly suspension character

BMC SPEEDFOX 02 SLX-XT

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Can BMC really deliver race bike speed and trail bike control?

So Good

Exceptionally stiff and feedback-rich frameset

Efficient power- and precision-friendly suspension

No Good

Continental tyres are neither fast nor grippy, so re-rubber ASAP

2016 bike will get the new, better Fox 34 fork

JARGON BUSTER**Press-fit**

Bottom bracket bearings that are pressed directly into a wider frame, as opposed to screw-in external bearings.

Progressive

Suspension where the spring rate increases as it goes deeper into its travel.

BMC's Speedfox is a great blend of powerfully muscular race bike and consistently controlled, HD feedback trail confidence, making it a super-versatile high velocity all-rounder.

The frame

Read any review of a current carbon BMC bike on road or dirt and you'll see that the Swiss brand really are on top of their composite chassis game. The Speedfox is a prime example, with a boxy tubeset that includes a massive down tube, press-fit bottom bracket and reinforced, extended top tube. The Y-strut reinforced, high-arched seatstay back end is attached with short – and therefore very stiff – linkages. Detail is excellent too, with internal duct inserts keeping cables out of the way of knees, a built-in carbon chain-drop guard and neat orange anodised cable caps.

The kit

Despite the high-quality carbon chassis you're still getting decent kit. The Fox 32 fork is much lighter than the 34 on the Mondraker and well damped enough to hold lines better than the skinny chassis would suggest. The Shimano XT cranks and rear mech

are mixed with an SLX front mech and brakes, which are a step up from the Deore kit on the Ghost. While it adds weight, the finer gear spread of a 2x10 transmission will be welcomed by long-distance riders. The cockpit kit suits the bike's character well and the DT Swiss wheels are fine for narrower tyres, though we'd choose faster rubber than the Continentals fitted. At the time of going to press the Speedfox was being sold for £390 less than the RRP too, making it a real bargain.

The ride

We've been riding carbon-mainframed 29ers from BMC for several years now and the rock solid stiffness of the chassis still surprises us. It's not just a sense of strength in one direction or part of the frame either. Consistently taut and accurate feedback runs from the through-axes at either end to the tips of the handlebar and into the soles of your feet. Even the stiffer direct mount for the rear mech is obvious in the form of crisper shifting.

This stereotypically Swiss precision and control underlines the whole character of the Speedfox and it's a direct contrast to the more flexible and vague Ghost. We were much happier

pushing hard and slotting aggressive lines on the BMC despite the more slippery tyres because we always knew exactly what was happening. The fine line between controlled slide and wipe-out is clearly communicated so you've time to react and keep it rubber side down. Having said that, the Speedfox is worth rebooting as soon as possible, because the Conti tyres are sketchy in the damp and slow rolling, particularly on the front.

There's enough baseline precision and feedback from the frame that we didn't feel any immediate need for a wider bar than the 720mm pipe fitted. The 70mm stem is also a good length for the XC/trail character of the BMC. It's short enough to react fast to the information the bike is constantly feeding you but stable enough to naturally stay on line when you've forgotten how to steer at the end of an epic. It also adds some length to the otherwise short top tube, so we didn't feel overly cramped even coming off the monster Mondraker.

The steep 74-degree seat angle means plenty of weight on the front tyre to add authority, and while it's not a naturally wild, hop-and-pop ride, the BMC is happy to be pushed hard »

Bike Test

29ER TRAIL BIKES
£2,600-£2,800

WHILE IT'S NOT A NATURALLY WILD RIDE
THE BMC IS HAPPY TO BE PUSHED REALLY
HARD WHEN YOU'RE IN THE MOOD



when you're in the mood. That meant we dropped the saddle at the top of most descents to let rip, so a dropper post upgrade would be worthwhile.

The suspension is similarly well judged in tune. Using the printed sag guide on the linkage pivot gives a sports car rather than spongy feel even in the fully open 'descend' mode, so you can still attack the trail hard through the pedals. While it doesn't blow though travel unnecessarily there's enough progressive control in

the 130mm (5.1in) stroke to take big hits and serious drops without losing composure or getting bounced off line. Flick to 'trail' mode and the bike still responds enough to chatter and batter to carry speed across blunt edges and holes, but you're able to lay down the power immediately from a consistent and predictable mid-stroke position.

The muscular frame and low weight meant we had no trouble stomping big gears and sprinting clear of the other bikes, and the aggressive suspension

tune meant we never felt the extra travel was a disadvantage. It adds a definite speed sustain advantage over rougher terrain though, which is only amplified by the 29in wheels, and it's no surprise that Julien Absalon won the 2014 XC World Champs on a BMC 29er.



MBUK

Businesslike rather than playful, but a fantastically efficient, muscularly powerful, feedback rich, high velocity all-rounder



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Bike Test

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SERIOUS SWAG

Longer/lower/slacker handling plus stiffer SCR rear end Boosted to 148mm give the Whyte outstanding control and swaggering confidence

DIALLED DAMPERS

Fox's new 34 fork and EVOL rear shock reset the benchmark for lightweight trail control

WORTH THE WAIT

Our first production bike with Shimano's new 1x11 XT gearing has left us impressed

WHYTE T-129 RS

£2,750

Does our benchmark big-wheeled trail bike get even better for 2016?



So Good

Handling is an outstanding mix of easy 29er speed, enduro swagger and pop-and-hop agility

Brilliantly judged equipment list includes the latest benchmark resetting kit from Fox and Shimano

No Good

Limited rear space means 2.2in tyre is the max

Low belly means more crank taps



JARGON BUSTER

Front centre

Distance from the front axle to the crank axle. The longer it is, the more stable the bike is likely to feel.

EVOL

Fox's new shock has an increased negative spring volume to increase sensitivity without compromising support.

Whyte's designers admit their inventory would be simpler without a 29er in the line-up but they reckon the T-129 is the best bike they've built. We'd actually go further and say the new RS is one of the best bikes anyone has ever built, in price for performance terms.

The frame

While it looks the same, even in colour, the new frame has a one-degree slacker head angle, 25mm longer top tube, 35mm longer front centre and is 8mm closer to the ground. All the T-129 bikes now get the much stiffer, single-ring specific main pivot and chainstay design of last year's Works bike but in the latest extra-wide Boost 148 format. The internally clamped seat tube gets a neat rubber collar and the bearings are lifetime warrantied. Rear space is still limited though, with a 2.2in tyre the muddy maximum.

The kit

That means Whyte have sensibly specced 2.0in WTB rubber at the rear, relying on easy tubeless capability to add impact survivability. Hope provide the bombproof Boost 148 compatible

rear hub, which carries the wide-range 11-speed cassette for Shimano's brilliant new XT gearing. Brakes are also XT, while Race Face supply the single-ring Turbine cranks and the well-shaped cockpit is Whyte's own. A wipe-clean Whyte saddle tops the RockShox Reverb Stealth seatpost to complete an excellent value and usefully light complete bike package.

The ride

If we had to win why the big-wheeled Whyte has consistently been one of our favourite bikes it's because it always manages to place its wheels perfectly for minimal correction and total confidence. The 2016 geometry gives it even more self-corrective stability at speed and the new pivot architecture makes the back end feel even more tight and agile. While there's some twist in the skinny seatstay terminals and the big wheels inevitably flex more than smaller hoops, the big bar cockpit and Fox 34 fork still transmit feedback well.

While it's not as accurate in feel as the BMC, the long front end feels almost as swaggeringly arrogant as the Mondraker when you're surfing the very edge of tyre traction. Crucially for

the fun levels of the T-129, you can flick the back end round much more easily. This makes it the only bike on test that naturally hops, pops and plays with the trail like a smaller-wheeled bike and our test team were foot out and flat out from the start.

The new Fox EVOL shock has a more sensitive start than the 2015 Float but ramps up more through the mid stroke. This gives excellent traction but also increases support so you can really scythe the super-surefooted geometry through corners. The 'trail' setting moves this noticeable firmness into the start of the stroke for a powerful pedalling feel without kicking about too much and knocking you off your rhythm. The RS is very composed deep in the stroke too, making the 120mm (4.7in) of travel feel like a lot more. The short back end also decreases the effect of the bigger wheels' unsprung mass so it doesn't hang up or get caught on the bounce like the longer travel, longer chainstay Mondraker.

This all means that, while the 2015 bikes soon felt short on control when trying to chase 650b wheeled enduro bikes down serious descents, we had to properly smash the new Whyte through boulder runs or send it off 10ft



**IT'S THE ONLY BIKE ON TEST THAT HOPS,
POPS AND PLAYS WITH THE TRAIL LIKE
A SMALLER-WHEELED BIKE**

step-downs to find its limit. The shock is really set-up tolerant too, so you'll get a great all-round feel even with a provisional sag setting. The smaller volume rear tyre also feels more stable when you're getting sideways, though you still need to keep pressure relatively high. The new Fox 34 is an excellent ally up front too. The new FIT4 damping is seriously smooth off the top but stays composed and predictable deeper in the stroke,

refusing to waste travel or lose the plot however hard you dare push it into rocky, rooty, steppy or otherwise high-risk situations.

The way the bigger diameter wheels naturally carry speed better across rough surfaces is obvious compared to 650b bikes too. The rowdy Hope rear hub doesn't spare the feelings of frustrated smaller-wheeled riders when you sit freewheeling behind them as they mash the pedals. The





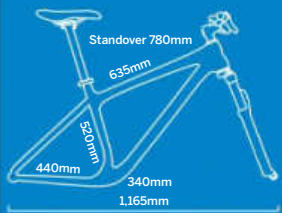
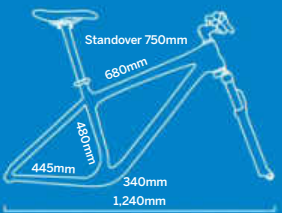
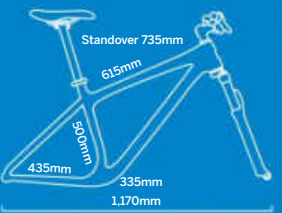
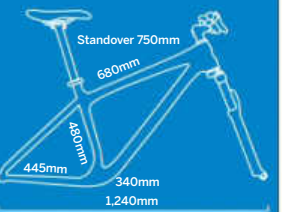
lightest wheel weight on test, impressively low overall weight and purposeful pedalling mean the Whyte wastes no time leaving them for dead when you stop coasting and get on the gas either. »

MBUK

Flat-out fun yet super-versatile – the perfect example of how brilliant 29er trail bikes can be



THE SPEC DECK

				
	GHOSH AMR LT 6 LC	MONDRAKER CRAFTY R	BMC SPEEDFOX 02 SLX-XT	WHYTE T-129 RS
PRICE	£2,699.99	£2,799	£2,600 (currently £2,210)	£2,750
DISTRIBUTOR	www.hotlines-uk.com	www.silverfish-uk.com	www.evanscycles.com	http://whyte.bike
WEIGHT	13.4kg (29.54lb)	14.49kg (31.95lb)	13.04kg (28.75lb)	13.55kg (29.87lb)
FRAME	Carbon fibre front triangle, aluminium rear triangle, 120mm (4.7in) travel	Aluminium, 130mm (5.1in) travel	Carbon fibre front triangle, aluminium rear triangle, 130mm (5.1in) travel	6061-T6 aluminium, 120mm (4.7in) travel
SIZES	XS, S, M, L (tested), XL	S, M, L (tested), XL	XS, S, M, L (tested), XL	M, L (tested), XL
FORK	Fox 32 Float CTD Evolution, 130mm (5.1in) travel	Fox 34 Float CTD Evolution, 140mm (5.5in) travel	Fox 32 Float CTD Evolution, 130mm (5.1in) travel	Fox 34 Float FIT4 Performance, 120mm (4.7in) travel
SHOCK	Fox Float CTD XV Evolution	Fox Float CTD Evolution	Fox Float CTD Evolution	Fox Float DPS Performance
HEADSET	FSA	FSA No.57	FSA No.57	FSA No.57
WHEELS	Hubs: Shimano Deore Rims: Ryde Rival 21 Spokes: Stainless butted Wheel weight: 2kg F, 2.58kg R (including tyres)	Hubs: DT Swiss M 1900 SPLINE Rims: DT Swiss M 1900 SPLINE Spokes: DT Swiss Champion Wheel weight: 2.19kg F, 2.7kg R (including tyres)	Hubs: DT Swiss M 1900 SPLINE Rims: DT Swiss M 1900 SPLINE 29 Spokes: DT Swiss Champion Wheel weight: 2.06kg F, 2.44kg R (including tyres)	Hubs: Whyte (F), Hope (R) Rims: WTB Asym i23 TCS 29in Spokes: DT Swiss Champion Wheel weight: 2.09kg F, 2.39kg R (including tyres)
TYRES	Schwalbe Nobby Nic 29x2.25in	Maxxis Ardent Exo Protection 29x2.4in	Continental Mountain King (F) and X-King (R) 29x2.2in	WTB Trail Boss 29x2.25in (F) and 29x2.0in (R)
CRANKSET/BOTTOM BRACKET	Shimano Deore XT M785, 38 24t/ Shimano Hollowtech II	SRAM S1000, 36/24t/ SRAM GXP	Shimano Deore XT M785, 38-24t/ Shimano Hollowtech II	Race Face Turbine Cinch, DM 32t/ Race Face BSA
DERAILLEURS	Shimano Deore (F), Shimano Deore XT M785 (R)	SRAM X7 (F), SRAM X9 Type 2 (R)	Shimano SLX (F), Shimano Deore XT M785 (R)	Shimano Deore XT M8000 (R)
SHIFTERS	Shimano Deore (2x10)	SRAM X7 (2x10)	Shimano Deore (2x10)	Shimano Deore XT M8000 (1x11)
CASSETTE/CHAIN	Shimano HG50, 11 36t/ Shimano HG54	SRAM PG 1030, 11 36t/ SRAM PC 1031	Shimano HG50, 11-36t/ Shimano HG54	Shimano Deore XT M8000, 11-42t/ Shimano HG600
BRAKES	Shimano Deore, 180mm rotors	Formula C1, 180mm rotors	Shimano Deore XT M785, 180mm rotors	Shimano Deore XT M8000, 180/160mm rotors
BAR/STEM/GRIPS	Ghost Low Rizer Light, 700mm/ Ghost AS GH1, 80mm/ Ghost lock on	Mondraker Crafty R, 760mm/ OnOff Stoic FG, 30mm/ OnOff Diamond 1 lock on	BMC MFB 02, 720mm/ BMC MSM 02, 70mm/ BMC semi lock	Whyte, 750mm/ Whyte Gravity, 60mm/ Whyte lock-on
SADDLE/SEATPOST	KS LEV Integra/Selle Royal Seta	X Fusion HiLo SLS/ Mondraker Crafty R	BMC MSP 02/ff'izik Nisene	RockShox Reverb Stealth/ Whyte custom
DIMENSIONS				
FRAME ANGLES	Head 69° Seat 74°	Head 68.5° Seat 74.5°	Head 68.5° Seat 74°	Head 67° Seat 73.8°
VERDICT	MBUK ★★☆☆☆ A smooth cruiser with distinctively hard or soft suspension, but easily spooked on scarier trails	MBUK ★★☆☆☆ Potentially crazy confidence and speed, but undermined by component compromises and weight	MBUK ★★★★★ Businesslike rather than playful, but a fantastically efficient, muscularly powerful, feedback rich all-rounder	MBUK ★★★★★ Flat-out fun yet super-versatile – the perfect example of how brilliant 29er trail bikes can be

WHAT OUR SCORES MEAN: We give each bike one overall score to sum up how it performs and its value for money. If a bike gets a score of five, it really is the best you can get in terms of both

★☆☆☆☆ Poor: simply put, don't bother ★★☆☆☆ Below average: flawed in some way ★★★☆☆ Good: it'll do the job and do it well ★★★★☆ Very good: one of the best you can buy ★★★★★ Exceptional: a genuine class leader



FINAL VERDICT

Getting back on a full stable of 29ers after a year of almost exclusively 650b bike tests has confirmed that bigger wheels are naturally smoother and faster on rougher trails. Keeping bigger wheels fun is definitely harder though, so who got it dialled from our foursome?

Ghost's AMR LT is a naturally smooth long-distance cruiser but it lacks the muscle to hold that speed when the trails get tougher and we're not surprised that the German brand will have a whole new interchangeable 650b+/29in wheel chassis for 2016.

We're disappointed that Mondraker have dropped the Crafty R in favour of a 650b version for next year though, because the Forward Geometry frame has outrageous high-speed confidence and control if you can

afford to upgrade past the component compromises.

BMC are definitely right to carry over their Speedfox chassis essentially unchanged because it's a standout stiff and authoritative frameset with highly efficient yet chaos capable suspension and handling. It's a bargain at the current reduced price too, though the 2016 bike will get a Fox 34 fork for an even more controlled front end.

Whyte haven't just added the superbly controlled 34 for 2016, they've gone with even more radical enduro style geometry up front and a stiffer frame out back. Add an outstandingly smooth yet controlled Fox shock, excellent 1x11 XT based equipment and the easy speed of 29in wheels and it's a perfect example of how 29ers can be brilliant fun trail bikes, not just blistering quick racers.

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KEEP A LID ON IT

*We test 15 max protection
open-face helmets designed
for fast and furious fun*

Words Guy Kesteven Pics Mick Kirkman

SHELL

All our test helmets have a hardshell skin in-moulded on top of the impact-absorbing body. Some extend the skin under the lower edge of the lid for extra protection. Vents are moulded into the outside of the shell to provide cooling airflow.

RETENTION SYSTEM

Adjustable webbing fabric straps stop the helmet falling off in a crash, but nearly all lids also use an adjustable cradle that grips the back of your head. Strap buckles, strap placement and cradle design all vary between designs.

VENTILATION

The effectiveness of the vents is an important consideration because a sweaty head can be seriously uncomfortable. Front ports draw air in, internal channelling distributes it and rear vents let it escape.

MOUNTS

More and more helmets are coming with fixed or removable mounts for lights and cameras. They can potentially reduce the effectiveness of the helmet if you crash though, and need to be positioned correctly to maintain balance.

MIPS

The Multi-directional Impact Protection System is a semi-mobile liner that lets the outer shell rotate and slide on your head in the event of an angled impact. This can significantly reduce the rotational force and trauma transmitted to your brain.



WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE



EXCEPTIONAL:
A genuine class leader



VERY GOOD: One of the best you can buy



GOOD: It'll do the job and do it well



BELOW AVERAGE:
Flawed in some way



POOR: Simply put, don't bother!



THE TESTER

Guy Kesteven

Nobody knows more about what's going on with their head than a bald bloke who rides every day, whatever the weather, and nobody uses their head for more meticulous testing than our Kes.

What to look for

How to find a lid you'll love

THE FIRST THING to say is that accurate fit is crucial to the comfort, stability and, ultimately, the protection offered by your helmet if you're unlucky enough to slam it into the ground while it's on your head. While most lids are adjustable enough to fit most heads, some shell shapes sync better with round skulls and others are more stable on square nuts. Different cradle heights and designs also work better or worse depending on your skull shape and hair or lack of it. The position of cradle tighteners, straps and buckles, pads and even vents can all make a big difference to whether a helmet works for you too, so while we've described the fit pros and cons for each lid on test, getting into a shop and actually trying them on is a much smarter idea than saving a few quid on the internet.

The second thing to point out is that this test concentrates on the latest extra-protection trail/enduro lids. While all helmets sold in the UK conform to the EN 1078 CE (and US CPSC) standard, those on test have increased rear coverage and broad shells so less of your head is exposed. That means they're heavier and hotter than shallower, better ventilated XC helmets. We got a shock from how much we sweated in some of them, so if you're into flat-out climbs as much as flat-out descents, prioritise the cooler protection lids here. If you're after more protection from branches, rocks or crashes then a deeper, less ventilated lid will keep more of you



covered without being as heavy and hot as a full-face helmet. If you want the latest in protection tech then look out for lids with a secondary MIPS skin between the pads and the shell.

Helmets have a potentially important role to play in protecting you from the weather too, be that dazzling sun or driving rain. How big and intrusive/protective you like your peak comes down to personal preference, though a bit of adjustment is always useful. Increasing numbers of helmets now come with optional mounts for cameras and lights. Given recent safety-based racing decisions and the potential for a camera or light to punch straight through a lid or increase shearing forces in a crash, they're a controversial inclusion.

Finally, while adding MIPS or complicated cradle, peak or mount systems inevitably adds to the cost, fashion can have as much bearing on price as function. That means helmets without a prestige name can deliver all the performance you need for a lower price. Having tried a couple of £30 lids that looked fine on the web but really didn't work on our heads, we'd advise against going too cheap though. »

HOW WE TESTED THEM

THIS TEST FOCUSES on helmets designed for trail/enduro riding rather than faster moving XC, so we tested them accordingly, using slower, steeper climbs and heavier bikes to see how the ventilation coped with slower speed but higher intensity exercise situations. We then blasted back down the same trails to assess their ability to get rid of that same heat before switching lids and hitting the same loop again.

We rode in the helmets over several months, exposing them to all weathers, head shapes and fit preferences. This taught us what they felt like after an epic day in the saddle, which ones synced with what specs, which only vented properly when we weren't moving and which peaks were just ornamental. Finally we weighed them, checked them for wear and tear, compiled all our notes and then wrote the best, most detailed trail helmet test you'll find.

NOTE: Weights given are for a 56cm (generally M) size, though many of the helmets were tested in several different sizes.



JARGON BUSTER

> Bug mesh

Netting inside vents to stop insects getting into the helmet.

> Cradle

Plastic section of the retention system that tightens around the base of the skull to give a snug fit.

> EPS

Expanded polystyrene – the

shock-absorbing foam that makes up the inner shell of most helmets.

> Exit ports

Vents at the rear of the helmet that allow warm air to escape.

> In-moulding

One-piece outer and inner shell construction, allowing lower weight and better ventilation.

> Double in-moulding

A pricier process in which the outer shell extends around the lower rim of the helmet to protect the EPS foam from damage.

> MIPS

A helmet technology designed to protect your brain from rotational forces in a crash by letting the outer shell rotate upon impact.

> Occipital lobe

The bony knob on the back of your skull just above the neck junction.

> Retention cradle

The adjustable headband that alters the inner circumference of the helmet to ensure a good fit.

> Snaplock

Widely used plastic buckle system

that clicks together and must be squeezed to release.

> Peak

Peaks don't just stop you looking like a road rider – they also provide useful protection from sun and rain, as well as channeling air into the helmet's vents.



WEIGHT 315g
SIZES S, M, L

Smith Forefront

£190 Saddleback www.saddleback.co.uk

THE FOREFRONT USES a unique honeycomb material that's said to absorb 30 per cent more impact force than a conventional EPS lid. It also allows wider vents than normal in the carbon-reinforced shell. The tubes radiate heat out really well when you're stood with a steaming head. Unfortunately they need to, because there's no internal airflow and only limited cooling effect when you're moving. The pan pipe effect

of the honeycomb creates a lot more wind noise than normal and the lid costs a fortune. It's a shame because the design is good otherwise. The tube ends are comfy even on a bald head and the multi-height cradle gives good stability. Distinctive styling includes an adjustable peak, glasses ledge and goggle strap guide. A MIPS version is available too.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 350g
SIZES S/M, L/XL

O'Neal Defender

£69.99 O'Neal Europe www.oneal.eu

O'NEAL'S DEFENDER IS one of the rounder helmets here and doesn't suit squarer heads, with significant sideways rocking even when it's tight front and back. There's no vertical cradle adjustment, though the big, soft pad helps spread occipital pressure. The straps are anchored in the lower edge for easy access and the magnetic FidLock buckle is really clever and quick to use. There's no lower rim hardshell coverage and the

fixed peak doesn't provide much weather protection. What really lets the Defender down though is its lack of ventilation, with the healthy number of large external openings all tapering to tiny inside vents. There's minimal channelling to promote airflow and the full catcher's mitt of padding round the front soon gets soaked with sweat.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 276g
SIZES M, L

MET Parabellum

£129.99 MET Helmets www.met-helmets.com

THIS HAS THE potential to be a great high-performance lid but its appeal is undermined by fit and peak issues. Minimal padding, with a sweat-managing silicone brow strip, combines with masses of vents and internal channelling to make it really well ventilated. It's light too, despite full-depth protection around the rear and sides. Unfortunately the rounded shell rocks from side to side on narrow heads, even with extra pads

and the fixed-height cradle done up tight. The high set, extra long peak pushes a long way down into your field of vision and peripheral protection isn't great either. Our peak's indexed angle setting mounts rapidly became loose, letting it flap up and down even if we cranked the side screws up tight. Cost is also high for a non MIPS helmet.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 337g
SIZES S/M, M/L

Cratoni AllTrack

£119.99 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

THE FIT OF this full-featured enduro lid divided our test team. Wider headed, round skulled riders got on fine with its bowl-like shape, but even with the optional thicker pads installed and three cradle heights to choose from, narrower nuttered testers struggled to get a stable fit without excess pressure on the minimalist rear cradle. If it does fit, then the rubbery coating gives the AllTrack good longevity and the ratchet chin

strap is easy to micro-adjust. The long, high-mounted peak is fully adjustable with obvious notches, so you can position it to give a lot of weather protection or lift it right up to leave room for your goggles, and there's a strap clip for these on the back too. Ventilation is better than average, especially if you remove the camera mounting shoe on the top.

MBUK ★★★★★

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WEIGHT 302g
SIZES S/M, M/L, XL

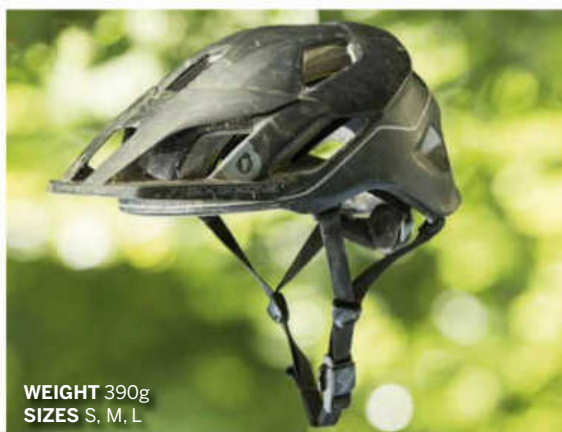
Urge SupaTrail

£99.99 Decade Europe www.decade-europe.com

THE SUPATRAIL IS modelled on the SupaCross XC helmet but with the addition of Urge's signature super-thin peak. Raised 'ears' and meshed porthole vents create Marmite styling, but the fit suited all our testers despite the fixed height cradle. It has a noticeably lower profile than a lot of the lids here, so you won't look like a mushroom head. Edge anchored straps make fitting easy and prevent interference

with glasses. There's no double in-moulded hardshell protection on the lower edge though and the bleed of the liner over the shell looks a bit scruffy. Use of recycled materials means it's protecting the planet as well as your head. Coverage isn't as deep dish as with Urge's All-M, but it's significantly lighter and cooling is better at higher speeds too.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 390g
SIZES S, M, L

SixSixOne EVO AM MIPS

£129.99 Decade Europe www.decade-europe.com

SIXSIXONE WERE AMONG the first to adapt their trail helmet to use a MIPS liner. The EVO AM's rounded shell has broad pads covering every inside face as well as the cradle itself so it's very comfy, but the lack of height adjustment left it feeling a little insecure on some testers. You can't adjust the broad peak with its flat front edge either, so if you find it intrusive you're stuck with it. Edge anchored straps make it easy to slap

the helmet on and the complete hard shell covering gives full scuff and drop protection. Big vents, internal channels and gaps in the MIPS liner mean decent airflow, but the extensive areas of pad contact make it very sweaty if you're prone to getting hot-headed. Pricing is quite high, though there's a version for £99.99 without MIPS.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 257g
SIZES S, M, L

Lazer Magma

£69.99 Madison www.madison.co.uk

LAZER'S NEW HYBRID lid offers more rear protection than most XC helmets and its super-light weight makes it ideally suited to long rides. The ARS cradle, with its unique roller tightener on the top of the lid, has loads of height adjustment and gives a secure fit whether you've got a skinhead or a ponytail. Masses of vents, internal channels and strip pads give much more effective air con than the other helmets here. The

hardshell doesn't extend to cover the bottom edge of the inner shell so it needs a bit more TLC than fully armoured lids. The fixed peak gives little protection from sun or rain at the sides. Lazer's Oasis offers more protective depth, a broader peak and built-in light/camera mount in a similarly well vented and secure package for 100g and £30 more.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 363g
SIZES XS/S, M/L, XL/XXL

Troy Lee Designs A1 Drone

£129.99 Fisher Outdoor Leisure www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

NO HELMET COMES close to matching the number of finishes you can buy an A1 in. The wrap-around, multi contact point padding in a well shaped rounded shell gives it a uniquely snug and secure feel even before you tighten the adjustable cradle and clip the straps together. The straps are edge mounted for easy fitting and a full top and bottom moulded hard shell keeps it well protected when it's not on your

head. There's plenty of depth on the temples and back of skull to keep you protected when it is too, and the peak is adjustable. The downside to the cosy, all-encompassing fit, which makes it the comfiest lid on test, is that even with a reasonable number of front, top and exit vents the A1 is an absolute sweat bucket. It's expensive for a non MIPS lid too.

MBUK ★★★★★

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WEIGHT 327g
SIZES S,M,L

Giro Feature MIPS

£89.99 Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

GIRO'S FEATURE IS the cheapest MIPS helmet here and costs a good deal less than several of the non MIPS lids too. There's plenty of depth at the back, making this a highly protective helmet. The straps are edge anchored, making it easy to stick straight on, and the cradle fits well too. The adjustable peak gives plenty of weather protection. Despite the extra protection, this lid is relatively light. There's no lower

edge protection for the EPS liner though and the lip in front of the ears can interfere with the arms of some specs. Airflow is better than the relatively small number of vents suggests, but it's still not great and the broad pads soon get sweaty in summer. The non MIPS Feature is a reasonable £69.99 and there's a female-specific Feather version too.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 318g
SIZES S/M, M/L

iXS Trail RS

£84.99 Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

WATCH THE SIZING on the Trail RS – our S/M sample only just squeezed onto a 56cm head with the rear cradle pad removed. The edge anchored straps and dial-adjust cradle give faff-free fitting though and the extra pad on the chinstrap can be removed if you don't like it. The hardshell extends to cover the rim, protecting against accidental scuff and drop damage, and the peak gives excellent weather protection,

though the way it overhangs the eyeline in the low position was borderline intrusive for some testers and it can't be adjusted much. An array of generously sized vents and internal channels mean ventilation was universally liked. The minimal strip pads reduce sweat and heat build-up, and the price is reasonable for the high quality construction.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 302g
SIZES S, M, L

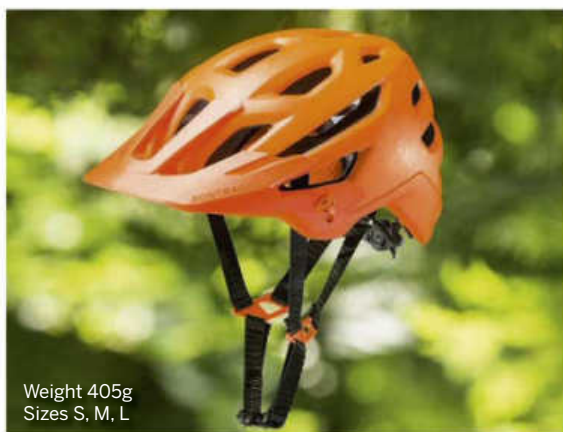
Specialized Ambush

£120 Specialized www.specialized.com

THE SCULPTED SHAPE of the Ambush gave a secure fit for all our testers. Specialized's Mindset 360 cradle system builds the dial into the shell, wraps around the head and offers five height positions. Y-shaped pieces on the edge anchored straps keep them flat and away from your ears. The body of this deep dish helmet is built from dual-density EPS for max protection where it's needed without creating a bulbous shape,

and the hardshell covers the rim at the sides. The low weight is noticeable on rough trails and long days out, and the peak is widely angle adjustable. Internal channelling means the big vents provide better than average airflow and the small brow vents make a big difference to sweat levels too. This extra performance costs extra though.

MBUK ★★★★★



Weight 405g
Sizes S, M, L

Bontrager Rally

£69.99 Bontrager www.bontrager.com

IF YOU LIKE a snug fit you'll love the way the Rally slides onto your skull for a secure but never cramped feel that means you can run the cradle relatively loose to avoid pressure points. While there is a small amount of height adjustment, we never had to use it. The extended bridges on the flush fitting straps will appeal to anyone bothered by flap and clatter against their ears or glasses. The soft peak is fully angle adjustable, from

low for plenty of protection to flipped right up to sit your goggles underneath, and it stays where you put it too. Big front and top vents link into deep internal channels with slim padding for impressive air con at all speeds. The helmet body drops right down at the back for extra loop-out landing coverage. It's heavy on the scales though, at over 400g.

MBUK ★★★★★

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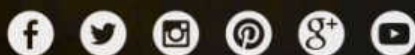
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WINNERS

Tester says...

“When things go wrong out on the trails an enhanced protection helmet could be a lifesaver. The lids on test hit their value peak with Raleigh and their protective zenith with Bell, but nothing combines ventilation, fit and protection as well as Scott’s Stego.”



WEIGHT 348g
SIZES S, M, L

Scott Stego MIPS

£119.99 Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com

SCOTT ARE ANOTHER brand getting into the enhanced protection world of MIPS. Crucially, they’ve done so without obviously compromising other performance aspects like breathability and ventilation, which has cemented the Stego’s winner status. Large holes in the yellow MIPS liner mean there’s no compromise in airflow through the big front, side and rear vents. The liner sits over broad internal channels too, so the wind whistles over your scalp when you get up to speed. Minimal padding means no lingering soggy if you get sweaty on the way back up.

The shell shape is broad, which will trip some riders’ style alarms (the large size is particularly massive) but there’s enough adjustment in the free floating, dial tightened cradle for a

secure and supportive fit. The small skull gripper segments have lasted better than on other helmets we’ve used and there’s no fabric to smell like rancid milk after a summer season. Edge strap anchoring means easy fitting and minimal strap slap and specs interference, and the snaplock fastener simply works. Full hardshell coverage makes it kit bag and accidental kickabout proof too.

The broad shovel of a peak provides masses of shelter whatever the weather, while the deep dish rear gives reassuring protection. If you tend to pedal rather than push or uplift then the extra ventilation is worth the extra £30 over the similarly protective Giro Feature MIPS.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 321g
SIZES S, M, L

Raleigh Magni

£44.99 Raleigh www.raleigh.co.uk

RALEIGH’S HELMET IS the cheapest here by a long way but it performs better than a lot of pricier lids. The deep shell protects the back of your head, and it has a dual-density EPS liner. The cradle is single height but there’s a big pad to prevent occipital pressure points under the easy-to-use dial. The straps anchor into the edge of the helmet, making it easy to flip them outwards to put it on, and double in-mould construction

gives the lower rim hardshell coverage for scuff protection. The clip-lock buckle gets a cam lock for extra security too. The broad and low fixed peak can flap and rattle at high speeds but otherwise it’s a great glare and rain shield. Big vents, internal channelling and loads of exit ports make it breezier than a lot of helmets here to seal its value winner status.

MBUK ★★★★★



WEIGHT 728g/429g
SIZES S, M, L

Bell Super 2R MIPS Equipped

£174.99 Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

IF WE COULD walk away with one lid from this test it would be the uniquely versatile Super 2R. While removable chin guards aren’t a new idea, the strength of the genuinely protective Bell chin bar and security of the three metal latches put it into a face-saving class of its own, making it a viable option as a big-hit lid. The MIPS liner could potentially reduce brain damage too and the broad peak gives decent weather shelter. Edge

anchored straps and a height adjustable cradle make fitting simple and secure. Multiple vents including front edge ‘Overbrow’ slots mean airflow is reasonably good despite the MIPS liner. It comes with an optional breakaway camera mount too, and if the cost is an issue you can get a non MIPS version too, with (£149.99) or without the chin guard (£99.99).

MBUK ★★★★★

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Trail blazing headlights tested **ON SALE 18 SEPTEMBER**

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MBUK Manual

THE SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE & PLACES TO
GO FOR A BETTER RIDE

P134 **HOW TO...**

THE FUNDAMENTALS #3 GAIN SPEED

Hone your corner carving, berm riding and terrain pumping skills



P140 **GRIMETIME**



Want slicker shifting? Here's how to fit new cables and index your gears



P142 **ASK MBUK**

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P152 **WRECKING CREW**

PORG, KENT

We make like Minnaar and hit some dusty turns at this classic South East riding spot



P144 **THE BIG RIDE**

The Isle of Man is famous for its TT loop but there's non-motorised fun to be had here too

MBUK'S ROUTE EXPERT



All our route maps are put together by route guru **Max Darkins**. Max loves travelling the country in search of the best trails and is also the man behind www.roughride.co.uk

ABOUT PRO RIDE GUIDES



Pro Ride Guides teach skills training in the UK. The team are headed up by Joe Rafferty, who has 10 years' coaching experience. Elite riders and skilled coaches Ben Deakin and Joe Flanagan are also part of the crew, as are enduro racers Phil and Sam Shucksmith.
www.proridemtb.com



the fundamentals GAIN SPEED

Want to ride faster? It's time to go back to basics and work on your corner carving, berm riding and pumping skills

Gaining and maintaining speed requires skill and practice if you want to maintain flow and not feel like you're riding on the ragged edge. This month we're looking at the core skills required to ride faster. In principle they appear pretty simple. Take flat corners, for example. They're one of the first things you learn to ride when you sling your leg over a mountain bike, but when it comes to speeding up, many riders find themselves scratching their heads

– or picking themselves up off the deck after a front wheel washout. We've gone back to basics so you can see if you're missing one of the essential ingredients needed to carve a perfect turn and leave your mates covered in dust. Riding berms and pumping the terrain are two more incredibly simple moves that many riders struggle with. Practise these skills out on the trails if you're looking to gain and maintain speed! >>

CARVING FLAT CORNERS

Flat corners are seldom found at bike parks and trail centres but they're probably the number one feature you need to master to ride natural and alpine trails well. There's no positive camber to help you round, so a good balance of lean, grip and body position is essential to avoid washing out. The key is to always lean the bike more than your body and look for a consistent surface on which to turn.

1 BODY POSITION FOR FLAT CORNERS

The aim is to stay over the top of the bike and lean it using your hips, feet and hands in co-ordination. This will drive the edges of the tyres into the ground. Leaning the bike with just your hands won't work because your feet will still be standing the bike up.

Chest Lower your chest so you have bent elbows and therefore room to lean the bike

Hips Twist your hips so they're facing the exit and over the outside of the saddle

Legs Push your body weight through the outside pedal. Push your outside knee in against the frame

Head Keep your chin up and look towards the exit once you've spotted your line

Arms Keep them up and straighten your inside arm. It's nearly impossible to lean the bike with your elbow under the handlebar. Push your inside hand towards the floor to help lean the bike

PUMPING BERMS

If the camber of the berm is good and there's plenty of grip then you can pump it to increase your speed. The positive camber of berms helps you to lean and means you don't need as much grip as you would in a flat corner so you can ride faster. Just like flat corners, the speed you're riding and the radius of the corner dictate how much you need to lean to stay on your line.

1 BODY POSITION FOR BERMS

On high-sided berms you can lean with the bike because there's a camber to push against and loads of grip. You still need to lean the bike a bit more than your body, and will need the power of both legs to generate maximum force to pump the turn.

Head As soon as you've spotted your line, lift your chin and look towards the exit

Arms Keep your elbows high and straighten your inside arm to lean the bike

Chest Lower your chest so you have room to lean the bike with your arms

Legs Push your outside knee in against the frame

Body weight Keep your weight through the pedals and as low as possible

Hips Turn your hips so they're facing the exit

2 BREAKING IT DOWN

The best place to practise your body position and bike leaning is on a road or fireroad with consistent grip. It's a good idea to break the corner down into four sections.

1 ENTRY

This is where you choose your line and set your speed. A wide entry is nearly always best for carrying speed, but it's important to find a line with consistent grip.

2 LEAN

As you enter the corner, lean the bike using your inside hand, hips and pushing your outside knee against the frame. How far you need to lean is dictated by your speed and how tight the corner is. More speed and tight corners require you to lean more.

3 ADJUST

If you're drifting wide on your line, then you need to make a conscious effort to lean more. The opposite applies if you've leaned too much. Try not to brake mid corner because you'll upset your balance and come out of the lean. Try to stay loose and relaxed.

4 EXIT

Allow the bike to stand up as you reach the exit straight. Too early and you'll end up wide. Your exit speed is the result of your entry speed, line and lean. If you grabbed the brakes or went off line, try to work out what it was that you did wrong.

2 BREAKING IT DOWN

Find a well-built berm with a grippy surface to practise on and break the corner down into these four sections.

2 LEAN

As you hit the berm, lean in by turning your hips to face the exit and pushing the bike down towards the floor. If you don't lean enough, you'll end up wide and probably grabbing the brakes.

4 EXIT

Come out of your lean at the exit and allow the bike to stand up. If you timed the pump right you'll exit faster.

1 ENTRY

Set your speed by braking and then coast in, looking to ride the line with the most supportive camber – usually near the top, but it can be low down in some berms.

3 PUMP

As you're leaning, get really low. Then push hard and extend your legs in towards the middle of the berm. It should feel like your max force is applied to the last third of the berm.

SQUASHING AND PUMPING

By squashing and pumping the terrain you can maintain and generate speed from the trail and stay in a good body position without having to pedal. With good timing you can pump almost anything with a downslope or backside. When a descent is rough and you need to stay in a good body position, then it's nearly always better to pump than pedal. Squashing is making yourself light over rough bits or upslopes that would otherwise send you up, and pumping is just making yourself as heavy as possible on a downslope to generate forwards speed. The most simple way to practise this is on a roller or pump bump.



SQUASHING As you ride into an upslope, allow the bike to go light by unweighting your feet and letting it move up underneath you. Sometimes it helps to push the bike into the floor just before you unweight it. Your body weight should maintain more forwards momentum by doing this.



PUMPING When your back wheel is on the downslope, make yourself heavy and push your bike into the floor to generate forwards speed. Timing is essential. Pump too early, on the upslope, and you'll hook up and lose speed. Pump too late, on the flat, and you'll gain no speed.



PUMPING A JUMP If you're riding fast enough to squash the upslope and still land on the downslope then stay low and land in a compressed position, extend your legs and push hard into the transition from steep to flat to generate forwards momentum.



PUMPING A ROCK OR ROOT Unweight by letting the rock or root push the bike up underneath you – you may have to hop a little. Let the front wheel roll over, then, just as the rear wheel starts to go down, apply force through your legs to generate forwards speed. You can practise your timing on kerbs.

LINE CHOICE

On natural trails there's usually lots of line choice, which makes things interesting. In general, straighter is often faster through technical sections and a late apex tends to be faster through corners. It's important to remember that the best line isn't the same for all riders – it depends on your skill level and speed. There's no point trying to hit a straight line if you're going to hook up on a load of roots and lose tons of speed. Focus on exit speed out of corners and technical sections. Anyone can haul into a corner and grab a handful of brake. Entering slower may mean that you can exit faster.



PEDALLING

Peddalling at the right time can increase your speed on downhill trails, but at the wrong time it'll actually lose you speed. If you don't need to be in a good body position because the trail is flat or easy, then pedal, damn it! If it's rough or there are jumps you're better off pumping.

GEARING

Before entering a technical section or corner, try to judge your exit speed and select a gear that'll let you power straight out. The most common mistake is for riders to find themselves in too high a gear after losing speed in a corner and then not be able to accelerate out. Click down if you know you're going to lose speed.

PEDAL LIKE YOU MEAN IT

If you want to pick up speed then put some power down and get on top of the gear

you've selected. Stand up and use your arms to pull the bike as you push down hard on the pedals.

PUMP IT OR CARVE IT?

In this feature we've split corners into two types – berms and flat corners – but out on the trail there's a big crossover, which means it's up to you to choose the best technique for the corners you encounter. If you're struggling for grip then you'll need

to carve the turn. If you've got plenty of traction and there's support for your lean, then pump it. When the corner is in the middle ground then you can use a mix of both techniques. Lean the bike over, get your hips on the outside, let your outside foot dip a little and push hard to generate speed and grip. Even on rugged natural trails, pro racers will always look for small banks and ruts that they can pump to help them turn and carry speed. Generally you can only really pump short corners though. 🚵

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01 Make sure your bike is clean, then clamp it in a workstand. Check that the rear mech and its hanger are straight, and that the bolt holding the mech onto the hanger is tight. While turning the cranks, shift into the smallest cassette sprocket and smallest chainring. Use a 5mm Allen key to loosen the cable clamp bolts on both mechs a few turns, turning it anticlockwise.



02 Wind the barrel adjusters on the shifters fully clockwise, then back them off two turns to allow adjustment later. Cut the cable end caps off the old gear cables using a good quality set of cable cutters. Grip the outer gear cable next to the first shifter with your fingers and pull it out a few inches, exposing the inner cable. Repeat on the other shifter.



04 It may be necessary to replace the outer cables too. In this case, remove all the old outer cables from the bike. Either cut new sections to match their length or cut a single section of outer cable to the same length as the exposed part of the old inner cable to create a full-length outer cable run. Use a pick to open up the ends. Install the new outer cables on the bike.



05 Lightly coat the new inner cables with lubricant by running them through a cloth or sheet of workshop paper impregnated with cable lube or 'wet' chain lube. Carefully feed the cables into the shifters in a reversal of step 3.



06 Feed the inner cable through the narrow end of a new ferrule, then the outer cable, then the wide end of another ferrule. Push the ferrules onto the outer cable. Repeat on each section of outer cable. Pull the inner cable through until the cable head is seated inside the shifter. Refit the plug/tab/screw/cap. Refit the shifter on the bar, if removed. Repeat on the other shifter.



10 Continue turning the cranks but release the front mech. The chain should drop onto the smallest chainring and stay there. If the chain falls off the chainring towards the frame, turn the 'L' screw clockwise. If the chain is reluctant to shift onto the smallest chainring, turn the 'L' screw anticlockwise. Adjust until the mech sits centrally over the smallest chainring.



11 Route the inner cable through the groove under the clamp bolt on the rear mech. Without moving the mech, pull the cable to apply a little tension. Tighten the clamp bolt until snug, turning it clockwise with a 5mm Allen key. Let go of the cable. Click through the gears while turning the cranks to tension the cable. Loosen the clamp bolt, take up any slack and retighten.



12 Ensure the front mech cage is in line with the smallest chainring and the cable is correctly routed to the clamp bolt. Tension the cable and tighten the clamp bolt, turning it clockwise with a 5mm Allen key. Let go of the cable. Click through the gears while turning the cranks. With the chain back on the smallest ring, loosen the clamp bolt, take up any slack and retighten.



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Tools for the job Essential kit

- 1 T25 Torx key
- 2 3mm Allen key
- 3 4mm Allen key
- 4 5mm Allen key
- 5 Cable or wet lubricant
- 6 Phillips (crosshead) screwdriver
- 7 Pick (or old spoke)
- 8 Cable cutters

Not pictured
Workshop paper or cloth



Shimano shifters

03a If you have Shimano shifters, use a Phillips screwdriver to unscrew the plastic plug on the opposite side of the shifter to the barrel adjuster, turning it anticlockwise. Put the plug somewhere safe. Push the exposed section of inner cable into the shifter. When the end pokes out the other side, pull the cable out and discard it. Repeat on the other shifter.



Newer SRAM shifters

03b If you have SRAM shifters with a rubber tab on top, use a 4mm Allen key or T25 Torx key to remove the shifter from the bar, turning the bolt anticlockwise. Peel the rubber tab upwards with your fingers. Push the exposed section of inner cable into the shifter. When the end pokes out from under the rubber tab, pull the cable out and discard it. Repeat on the other shifter.



Older SRAM shifters

03c Some older SRAM shifters have a winged screw or Allen bolt cap on top. Use your fingers/a 3mm Allen key to remove this, turning it anticlockwise. Carefully push the exposed section of inner cable into the shifter. When the end pops out from under the spring, pull the cable out – taking care not to dislodge the spring – and discard it. Repeat on the other shifter.



07 Turn the cranks. The chain should sit on the smallest cassette sprocket. If not, use a Phillips screwdriver to adjust the screw marked 'H'. Turn it anticlockwise to move the rear mech closer to the frame or clockwise to move it closer to the wheel. Adjust until the rear mech's top jockey wheel sits directly below the smallest sprocket.



08 Turn the cranks while pushing the rear mech towards the wheel. The chain should sit on the largest sprocket, with the top jockey wheel directly below it. If not, adjust the screw marked 'L'. Turn it clockwise if the chain is too close to the spokes or falls off the top of the cassette. Turn it anticlockwise if the chain won't move up from the smaller sprockets.



09 Turn the cranks while pulling the front mech away from the frame. The chain should shift onto the largest chainring easily. If not, turn the screw marked 'H' anticlockwise half a turn at a time until it does. If the chain is pushed off the chainring, wind the screw clockwise until this no longer happens. Fine tune until the largest chainring is central in the mech.



13 Turn the cranks and click through the front gears. If the chain is reluctant to shift onto the bigger rings, turn the barrel adjuster on the shifter anticlockwise. If it's reluctant to shift onto the smaller rings, turn the adjuster clockwise. When the shifting is smooth, use your cable cutters to cut the inner cable a few centimetres from the mech and crimp an end cap in place.



14 Turn the cranks and click through the rear gears. If the chain is reluctant to shift onto the bigger sprockets, turn the barrel adjuster on the shifter anticlockwise. If it's reluctant to shift onto the smaller sprockets, turn the adjuster clockwise. When the shifting is smooth, cut the inner cable a few centimetres from the mech and crimp an end cap in place.

WORKSHOP WISDOM

Before you start

replacing cables and indexing gears, remember that there are other things that can cause sloppy shifting. First, check that the rear mech is bolted to its hanger tightly, that the hanger is bolted to the frame securely and that the rear wheel is properly installed. Next, check that the mech

hanger and rear mech are straight and that the mech cage is in line with the chain. If the hanger is bent, ask your local bike shop to straighten it – or order in a new one if it's too far gone. Finally, check that the front mech cage is parallel to the chainrings and the right height above them. It should just clear the teeth of the largest ring.



MBUK

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Specialized's Jett is a good women's-specific 29er

Q I've got £3,500 to spend on a 650b enduro bike. The YT Industries Capra, Canyon Strive CF 8.0 Race and Specialized Enduro Elite 650b are just some of the bikes I've looked at. The YT is my first choice, but at 6ft 2in, would the size large bike be too small for me? I'm really interested in the Canyon too, but think that may also be a bit small for me.

Ify Offiah, via email

A The large Canyon Strive with Race geometry is actually pretty big. The reach – the distance from the centre of the bottom bracket to the centre of the head tube – is 6mm longer than on the XL regular Strive, and that's an important measurement in terms of fit and handling. The top tube and

YT's Capra is a great bike, but Canyon's Strive Race may suit taller riders better



wheelbase are shorter, but only by 3mm and 8mm, respectively.

The Canyon is bigger than the YT too. When the XL version of the aluminium Capra AL 1 becomes available later this summer, the large Strive Race will still have a longer top tube and reach (though only by 8mm). Right now, there's no word as to whether the pricier carbon Capras will get the XL treatment, so unless you're willing to go for the cheaper aluminium option, we'd say the Strive with Race geometry is your best bet. ☘

Q My girlfriend is keen to get into mountain biking (I know, result or what?!) but I'm a little in the dark as to what to go for bike wise. My budget is around £1,000 and she's 5ft 3in.

Mike Whiles, via email

A The key here is getting a bike that fits well and is suited to the riding you have in mind. It might be from a women's range, but equally, it might not. If you're adamant on going down the women's-specific route, Specialized plough a lot of time and effort into their women's bikes, ensuring they have plenty of standover room and parts that are suited to the female anatomy. Their Jett Pro 29er costs just under £1,000 and should lap up the miles with relative ease.

Q I've been borrowing a friend's SixSixOne Comp downhill helmet. It feels solid and is light enough to be comfortable. Are there any other full-face helmets at around the same price that are worth looking at before I get the SixSixOne?

Dan Taylor, via email

A There are a few different lids worth considering for under £100, but we'd always recommend trying before buying because helmet fit is so subjective. We've always got on well with Fox's Rampage and if you look around you should find it for less than its £100 price tag. The likes of iXS and Bell have well trusted models at reasonable prices too, all of which are worth a look.



QUICK FIX MOUNTAIN BIKE TIPS

Remove your chain with quick link pliers



01 Shift into the smallest sprocket and chainring. Spin the cranks until you find the quick link in the chain. Pull the rear mech cage forward (disengage the clutch, if it has one), unhook the chain from the chainring and rest it on the frame.



02 Slot the jaws of the quick link pliers into the chain so that they rest against the rollers at each end of the quick link. Squeeze the handles together so that the quick link plates slide on the chain pins.



03 Remove the quick link pliers. Carefully unhook the quick link plates from either side of the chain and store them somewhere safe and clean. Unthread the chain from the rear mech and remove it from the bike.



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MANUAL

ISLE OF MAN

TIME TO MAN UP! THIS ISLAND IN THE IRISH SEA MAY BE
SMALL BUT IT'S GOT SOME BIG HILLS AND GREAT TERRAIN

Words Max Darkins Pics Russell Burton



We had no idea there'd be quite so much climbing on the Isle of Man



On the hottest day of the year so far, with temperatures reaching a tarmac-melting 37°C, I'm sat stationary in my van on the M6 in the usual traffic jam around Birmingham. To make things even sweeter I have a ferry to catch at 7.15pm from Liverpool to the Isle of Man, and the sat-nav ETA keeps jumping mercurially between 7.15 and 7.30pm.

Somehow I manage to make it to the boarding kiosk with just a minute to spare and, after thrusting my papers through the window, they kindly usher me on, and we've set sail before I've even got out of the van.

Calm before the storm

Ferries always make any trip feel like a holiday, so I ease back in a big comfy seat to relax before enjoying a meal on board and even a little snooze to calm down after all the

excitement. I'm woken by a deluge of rain hammering down onto the boat, and it slowly dawns on me as I come to that I've only packed cycling gear for the hot, sunny weather the Met Office had promised. Being a hilly island out in the Irish Sea, the Isle of Man has its own microclimate, so it's always advisable to carry at least a waterproof (mental note to self – do this next time).

The next morning the clouds are hiding behind the tops of the hills but it's otherwise fair so I'm raring to get going. I've been over before and ridden the popular End 2 End route, which travels 75km from the northern tip of the Isle of Man to the southernmost point, and am keen to explore this bicycle friendly island further.

Nigel Morris from the Manx Mountain Bike club is on the seafront to meet me for today's ride, but I'm also interested to hear about the Manx 100 event that he runs, which is a step (or two) up from the E2E. This

THE LOWDOWN

ISLE OF MAN



The Isle of Man lies 60km off the English coast in the Irish Sea. Measuring 52km by 22km it has some unexpectedly big hills and lots of riding for all disciplines.

www.visitisleofman.com



There are several plantations on the island if you want a rooty singletrack fix

smaller, more exclusive event seeks out the more challenging routes that the E2E avoids, offering either a 100km or 100-mile ride around some of the island's best trails, starting and ending in Douglas.

Nigel and I set off along the promenade, weaving between the pedestrians as we head to the huge 'Electric Railway' sign up on the hillside. We've soon climbed out of Douglas and start twisting and turning our way up the never-ending hillside along quiet roads and tracks until we reach the edge of the Conrhenny Plantation.

Plantation peril

This plantation is used by the Loaghtan Loaded MTB club, who organise the Longest Day Longest Ride 24-hour charity event, and it's worth a quick loop around the singletrack and boardwalk trails they've built in here. Popping up the steep bank to the corner of the plantation we join a nice stretch of rooty singletrack, and I thoroughly »



The upside of all the climbing is that you get some great fast descents



GEAR UP FOR GRADIENTS

While the climbs aren't steep or technical, they are grindingly long and there are a lot of them, so prepare to feel the burn

enjoy it until I take a tree too close and crush my knuckle against a protruding branch on the blind side.

We continue past the car park and decide to join the road at the far end because time is tight today, so drop down the road before hanging a left that's all too easy to overshoot. The following climb is a big, long beast but it offers stunning views across the valley to our right, so it's easy enough to pretend you're taking it slow to take that in as you drag yourself up to Windy Corner.

This road is part of the TT course and there are no speed limits, though the tyre marks show that there obviously is a limit – some people just don't know it yet. The outside of this bend isn't the place to put your head down to read your map though, as I found out, with screeching tyres making me jump and pray for my life.

The clouds still haven't lifted up here, but we're heading back down, following a nice little

sheep track that leads us to a rocky outcrop. As the mist clears the views open up down the valley and it looks amazing, but Nigel ruins the moment by pointing out we've got to climb back up the trail on the far side.

Mighty Manx

Nigel's love for climbing is evident, and despite the diminutive size of the island, it has an awful lot of ascents to keep him happy. Gorse bushes, ruts and rocks lead us to a stream crossing before the long drag back up the other side. It starts on the road, becoming a good wide track by St Luke's Church, before offering multiple singletrack line choices to the top and a fast descent down the other side.

We join the tarmac here for a quick spin along the ridgetop once more, with far reaching views, and as we pass a lone house it dawns on me that we haven't seen a single other person since leaving Douglas. With a population »

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You can also use it to plan or download routes, access guidebook-style information, broadcast your location and track your friends. It has a social platform too, where you can store and share their adventures.

ViewRanger is used by more than 400 official bodies, including search-and-rescue teams in the UK and overseas.



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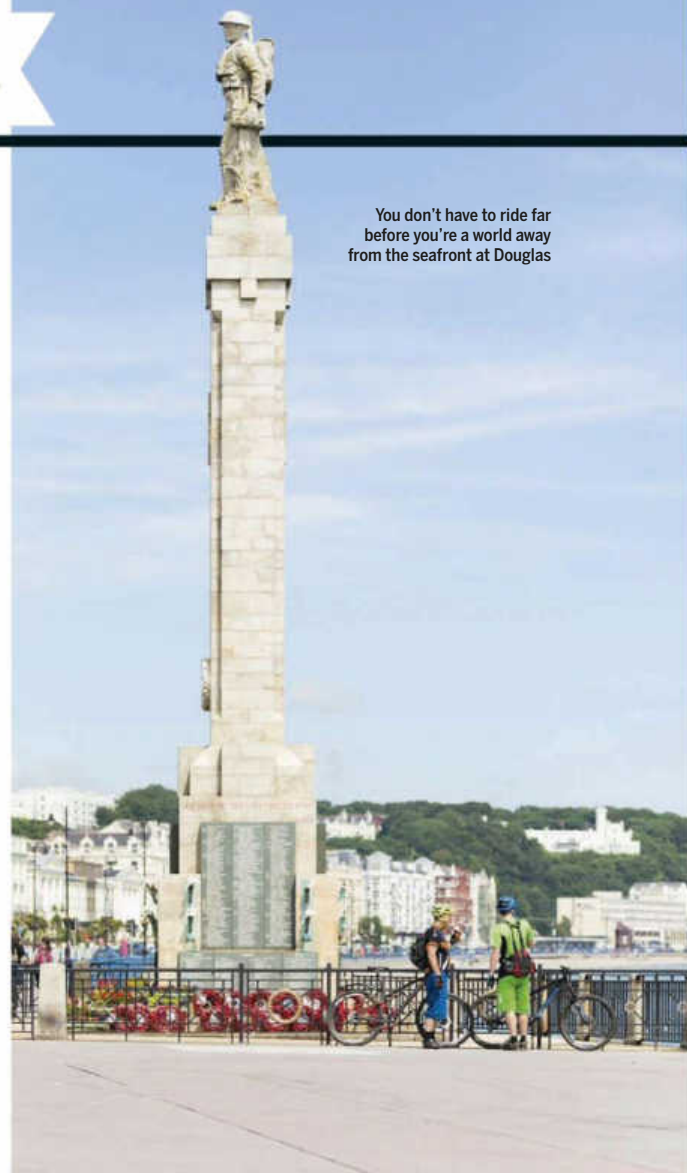
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Brief sections on tarmac afford welcome respite for tired legs



Up in the hills, it's possible to ride all day without meeting another soul



You don't have to ride far before you're a world away from the seafront at Douglas

of less than 90,000 and the centre of the island being largely uninhabited, it's easy to get away from everything feel like you're out in wild, remote countryside miles from anywhere. We soon turn off the road back onto the tranquillity of a forest track where both the E2E and Manx 100 routes go, before veering to the left for a fast, grassy descent with fantastic views of Douglas – when we dare raise our heads.

Fast blast

We weave through the heather, racing downhill and leaping off brows and bumps in the trail until hauling on the brakes for a rutted, rocky finale. Following a drystone wall, it's another fast grassy blast while trying to avoid the cow mines that scatter the trail to a gate where an unmarked section of swooping singletrack awaits us on the far side. Then there's a last short stretch of tarmac before we hit a rough lane that provides one more fun

descent, down to the road/TT course. After strategically placing myself behind crash-mat covered road furniture this time, we cross the road to join the old railway line, which provides an easy cruise back into Douglas.

The Archallagan and Chibbanagh plantations just off our route have some good trails through them, if your legs have anything left in them. Back on the Promenade the sun is blazing, and with nearly an hour before my ferry we have time for a cheeky ice cream.

After today's ride into the Manx hills it's easy to see how Nigel has managed to squeeze nearly 5,000m of climbing into the 100 miles of the Manx 100 route. A holiday destination it is, but don't expect to be able to take it easy out on the trails! This island really does offer something quite different, and if you fancy going somewhere a bit novel for your riding experience, then the IoM is definitely worth a crack. ●

BEST EATING

There's nothing available while out on the route (once you're outside of Douglas) until you reach the heritage cycle trail back into town, so stock up beforehand. In the capital there's a huge choice of places to refuel. The Davisons Manx Dairy Ice Cream cafe has a wide range of delicious ices as well as coffee and handmade chocolates to provide a tasty sugar and caffeine hit after a ride. For our evening meal we ate at Kurries and Steaks at the northern end of town, which was very good.

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Time for a ride?



SHIMANO



GIANT



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Kent isn't the most obvious mountain biking destination. But there's an unusual incentive to lure us east from our cider-fuelled base in Bristol today – 18-time World Cup winner Greg Minnaar is due to make an appearance at an old haunt of ours, PORC (Penshurst Off Road Cycling). Not wanting to miss the chance to ride some turns and slap some high fives with the DH superstar – and hopefully get a cover shot in the bag and some burgers and beer (and cider!) down our gullets – we hit the road.

Arriving at the bike park, we trundle up a bumpy fireroad

and come across a clubhouse, a children's playground and loads of riders setting up their DH bikes – there's the feel of a community here, tucked away in sleepy woodland. 'PORC Mike' – as owner Mike Westphal is known – is there to welcome us. He's known for his generosity, and has built a great venue here.

Lads on tour

Standing next to his homemade e-bike tricycle, Mike shakes our hands and introduces himself. The precedent is set – this is no ordinary bike park. Mike shows us around. First up »

WRECKING CREW

Mountain Biking UK

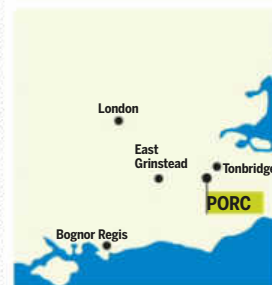
PORC, Kent

This long-running South East riding spot has jumps, berms, rocks and roots galore

Words Alex Evans Pics Steve Behr

THE LOWDOWN

PORC, KENT



DISTANCE: AS FAR AS YOU WANT – 9 DH TRACKS, XC LOOP, ENDURO COURSE

CLIMBING: AS MUCH AS YOU WANT, OR USE UPLIFT SERVICE

TIME: DESCENTS ARE ABOUT 1MIN LONG

GRADING: INTERMEDIATE TO ADVANCED (DH TRACKS)

WHY RIDE HERE?

PORC is at the heart of the South East's DH scene – there's loads to keep you entertained with its all-weather sandy terrain

RAD...

- Friendly locals
- Loads of jumps

BAD...

- Sandy ground destroys bike parts
- A bit more track maintenance wouldn't go amiss



boosts it, with Riley and Pat following suit. We watch other riders session it too, shouting as the stoke levels rise.

Reaching the bottom of the trail, we're greeted by the uplift service – an old Land Rover Discovery with an adapted trailer. With all the bikes loaded in a flash, the way up gives us a bit of time to revel in the thrills from the last run. We're all pumped with adrenaline and super-motivated to try out another track. The uplift also affords us the opportunity to take in the diverse scenery – pines and oaks sway in the wind as the green and vibrant Kent countryside rolls away into the distance. This is a truly stunning setting for a bike park.

Back at the top, we ask Jack to take us down one of his favourite trails and he



'PORC Mike' is the man to thank for all this



Looks like Pat Campbell-Jenner has been tangoed!



The Wrecking Crew Who are we?



ALEX EVANS

Features Ed Alex is fresh from the Alps and ready to sample the UK's finest trails.



OLIVER FORSTER

MBUK's Staff Writer loves nothing more than blitzing fast, challenging trails.



PAT CAMPBELL-JENNER

Super-pinned racer who knows a thing or two about riding.



JACK CHAPMAN

PORC local and super-stylish MTB skills coach with Flow Style.



RILEY JENNER

This 15-year-old pocket rocket knows how to shred and whip jumps.



GREG MINNAAR

South African DH racer who's now won more World Cups than any rider.

Jack knows these trails like the back of his hand

ONE OF JACK'S FAVOURITE TRAILS IS NEED FOR SPEED – A GREAT JUMPY, BERM-RIDDEN, FAST TRACK

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

LOCALS DO...

- Bring cash to pay for uplifts and great trail tucker
- Pick up all their litter
- Bring their tents for a bit of camping action

LOCALS DON'T

- Push their bikes up the tracks
- Dig without permission
- Ride without helmets

suggests Need for Speed – a great jumpy, berm-ridden, fast track. Off the same start straight we all sprint as fast as we can, gathering enough speed to clear the large jumps with ease as Pat sends a huge whip around a right-hand hip.

As we shoot down the track it's noticeable how well built the berms are – they propel you around the corners and inspire confidence, setting you up perfectly for the next straight. We roost the berms, making our back wheels squirm and tyres fold with the amount of G-force we're putting through the bikes in the turns.

Shooting stars

Local shredder Riley knows the tracks like the back of his hand and is oozing with confidence and enthusiasm. He impresses us with his nimble riding style and ability to manhandle the bike over some blind rock drops. At just 15 and fresh from a chemistry exam on the day of

the shoot, he's a rider to keep an eye on in the future.

Once again we reach the bottom of the small but well planned hillside. We catch the uplift back to the top, ready for another run. This time we hit some tighter, twistier tracks – catch berms and slapper turns mixed up with rocky shoots and a sizable gap jump are on the menu. Pat, Jack and Riley lead me and Olly out, showing us where to go and how to get the maximum amount of roost and dust in each turn. We both give it a go, copying their lines – just without the style!

Having managed to track down the man of the moment, Greg Minnaar, we take the opportunity to session a steep section with a grippy catch berm at the bottom with him. Greg leads us out, twitching the bike up high on the way into the turn – a perfect Scandinavian flick, executed on some gnarly terrain – before shooting around the corner and



Man of the moment
Greg Minnaar



Al clears one of
PORC's many
road gaps



WRECKING CREW WISDOM

"To get the most out of the riding at PORC I'd recommend buying the very cheap (£5) uplift ticket, which gives you 10 uplifts. This lets you smash out over 10 minutes of descending really quickly, and with the specially designed trailer your bike doesn't get eaten on the way up. I felt a little overbiked riding a DH rig, so would recommend anyone going to consider taking an enduro bike with 150 to 160mm of travel."

ALEX EVANS IMBUK FEATURES EDITOR

accelerating down the next straight. It becomes pretty clear why he's a World Cup winning superstar when we all try his wild high line, with mixed results. Olly manhandles his bike up high, only to be bumped off line by a sharp rock, unable to reach the same pace that Greg charges down »



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Alloy frame, X fusion rear shock, Rockshox Revelation fork, 20 Speed Shimano SLX/XT, Magura disc brakes rrp £2600 now £1249.99



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Alloy hardtail, Rockshox Reba RL Papioc fork, 30 spd Shimano SLX/XT grg, XT hubs and Deore hydraulic disc brakes rrp £1100 now £719.99



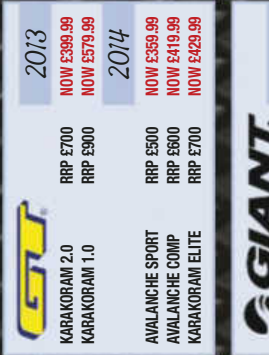
2014 CANNONDALE TRAIL SL29 3
Alloy frame, Rockshox XC 30 fork, 27 spd Shimano Alivio/Deore gearing, Shimano Hydraulic disc brakes 29er wheels rrp £900 nw £499.99



2014 SCOTT SCALE 720
Carbon frame, Fox Float forks, 30 speed Shimano XT/SLX gearing, Shimano disc brakes rrp £2500 now £1399.99



2013 GT KARAKORAM 2.0
alloy frame 29er, Rockshox XC28 fork, Shimano Alivio/Deore 27 speed gearing, Shimano hydraulic brakes rrp £700 now £399.99



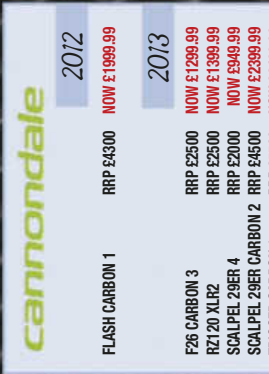
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2013	2014
KARAKORAM 2.0 RRP £700 NOW £399.99	KARAKORAM 1.0 RRP £900 NOW £429.99
AVALANCHE SPORT RRP £500 NOW £359.99	AVALANCHE COMP RRP £600 NOW £419.99
AVALANCHE ELITE RRP £700 NOW £429.99	

2013	2014
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XTC ADVANCED SL 1 RRP £3500 NOW £2249.99	GLORY FRAME RRP £2000 NOW £949.99
TALON 29 2 RRP £600 NOW £449.99	TALON 29 1 RRP £900 NOW £699.99
XTC ADVANCED 27.5 4 RRP £1600 NOW £1099.99	XTC ADVANCED 27.5 3 RRP £1900 NOW £1249.99
XTC ADVANCED 27.5 2 RRP £2500 NOW £1799.99	ANTHEM 27.5 3 RRP £1500 NOW £1099.99
ANTHEM 27.5 2 RRP £1850 NOW £1299.99	ANTHEM X 29er 3 RRP £1400 NOW £979.99
TRANCE 27.5 4 RRP £1300 NOW £899.99	TRANCE 27.5 3 RRP £1500 NOW £999.99
TRANCE 27.5 1 RRP £2300 NOW £1599.99	TRANCE X 29er 1 RRP £2000 NOW £1299.99



2013	2014
AIM DISC LTD RRP £380 NOW £299.99	ACCESS VLS LTD RACE RRP £1500 NOW £999.99
LTD PRO RRP £1100 NOW £719.99	REACTION GTC PRO 27.5 RRP £1400 NOW £1049.99
	REACTION GTC PRO 29 RRP £1400 NOW £1049.99



2012	2013
FLASH CARBON 1 RRP £4300 NOW £1999.99	F26 CARBON 3 RRP £2500 NOW £1299.99
	RZ1 20 XLR2 RRP £2500 NOW £1399.99
	SCALPEL 29ER 4 RRP £2000 NOW £949.99
	SCALPEL 29ER CARBON 2 RRP £4500 NOW £2299.99
	TRIGGER CARBON 1 RRP £5500 NOW £2499.99
	TRIGGER CARBON 2 RRP £3800 NOW £1749.99
	TRAIL SL 1 RRP £1100 NOW £679.99
	F29 1 RRP £2000 NOW £1179.99
	F29 2 RRP £1800 NOW £1099.99
	SCALPEL 29ER CARBON 1 RRP £6000 NOW £2699.99
	TRIGGER 29ER 1 RRP £3600 NOW £1799.99
	TRIGGER 29ER 2 RRP £3000 NOW £1099.99
	TRIGGER 29ER 3 RRP £2600 NOW £1249.99

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F29 BLACK INC RRP £7800 NOW £4249.99
F29 CARBON 3 RRP £2900 NOW £1439.99
F29 ALLOY 4 RRP £2400 NOW £1199.99
F29 ALLOY 5 RRP £2900 NOW £1599.99
TRIGGER 29 4 RRP £1250 NOW £799.99
TRAIL SL 29 1 RRP £900 NOW £499.99
TANGO 29 5 RRP £600 NOW £359.99
TANGO 29 6 RRP £500 NOW £309.99
RUSH 29 1 RRP £1900 NOW £1099.99
RUSH 29 2 RRP £1600 NOW £949.99



2013	2014
SCALE 640 RRP £1700 NOW £899.99	SCALE 735 RRP £1800 NOW £1099.99
SCALE 620 RRP £2500 NOW £1099.99	SCALE 720 RRP £2500 NOW £1399.99
	SCALE 935 RRP £1800 NOW £1199.99

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Riley is a young whippersnapper hungry for whips!



One swift jersey change later, Minnaar leads out the Wrecking Crew

the track at. Jack and Pat, meanwhile, thread the needle, dropping into the turn on line without too many dramas. But Riley's enthusiasm and excitement at getting to ride with Greg gets the better of him and he blows up the turn with an enormous dust cloud and one of the sketchiest drifts I've ever seen. Our short but sweet time breathing in Greg's roost is both humbling and enlightening at the same time

— we can only dream of riding with such skill!

We managed to ride most of PORC's nine DH tracks today. They're all pretty varied and there's a challenge for everyone. Later I catch up with Mike Joseph — the key track builder — and he explains his vision for the bike park. "I want to constantly make changes and improve and freshen the tracks so the riding is always interesting at PORC. I'd also

like to build a dual downhill track to introduce a new style of DH race events." Bring it on!

We head back to the car park, exhausted and exuberant from the day's awesome riding. PORC is brilliant fun and they've really made the most of the terrain they have. Other venues might have more to offer riding-wise, but there's a real sense of community and friendship here alongside some great DH runs. 🌀

THE DIRECTORY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PORC

GET THERE

Leave the M25 at junction 5 and head south on the A21. Turn off when you see signposts for Sevenoaks on the B245. Turn right before Hildenborough down Watt's Cross Road, joining the B2027. Continue to the B2176 into Penshurst. Turn right in the village on the B2188, then right on Grove Road. Go 500m and PORC is on your left.

FACILITIES

Cafe, bike shop, workshop, toilets, camping, free parking. A day pass costs £5 per adult, £3 for children and students. www.porc.uk.com

BIKE SHOPS

Whisper Bikes, Penshurst whisperbikes.co.uk
Wild Side Cycles, Tunbridge Wells www.wildside-online.co.uk

WHAT ELSE IS NEARBY?

Aston Hill

Official riding spot that's great fun for a DH fix. Watch out in the wet though — it gets slippery.

Rogate Downhill Bike Park

Loads of jumps and fantastic all-weather riding.

The Bull Track

DH venue with cool jumps so you can practise getting steezy.

VERDICT

A unique venue with an interesting range of riding — natural rooty sections followed by manmade berms, rocks gardens and big jumps. There's loads of airtime to be had on the DH tracks and at the dirt jump spot, with the broad mix of riding appealing to loads of people



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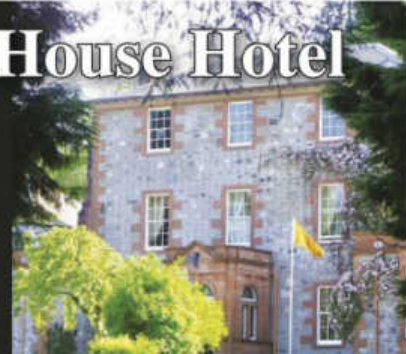
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A full-page background image of a mountain biker riding a trail through a dense forest. The biker is wearing a yellow and black jersey and a white helmet, riding a blue bike. The forest has many tall, thin trees and a mossy ground. The lighting is dappled, suggesting sunlight filtering through the canopy.

NEXT MONTH

Mountain Biking^{UK}

NEXT ISSUE

AIR FOR THE SCARED

Looking for more confidence on the jumps? Learn to tackle tabletops, doubles and drops with ease

SEE THE LIGHT

The nights are beginning to draw in so we're testing 15 light sets, plus have top tips for night riding

GET OUT AND RIDE

The best riding from the UK and abroad including Hamsterley Forest, Exmoor, a Pyrenees adventure and the buzzing New Zealand MTB scene

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STEVEN JONES, DIRT MAGAZINE



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Photo: Markus Greber

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